

# JULIUS CÆSAR

## A STUDY

J. MACMILLAN BROWN, M.A.

(Formerly Professor of English Literature, Canterbury College).

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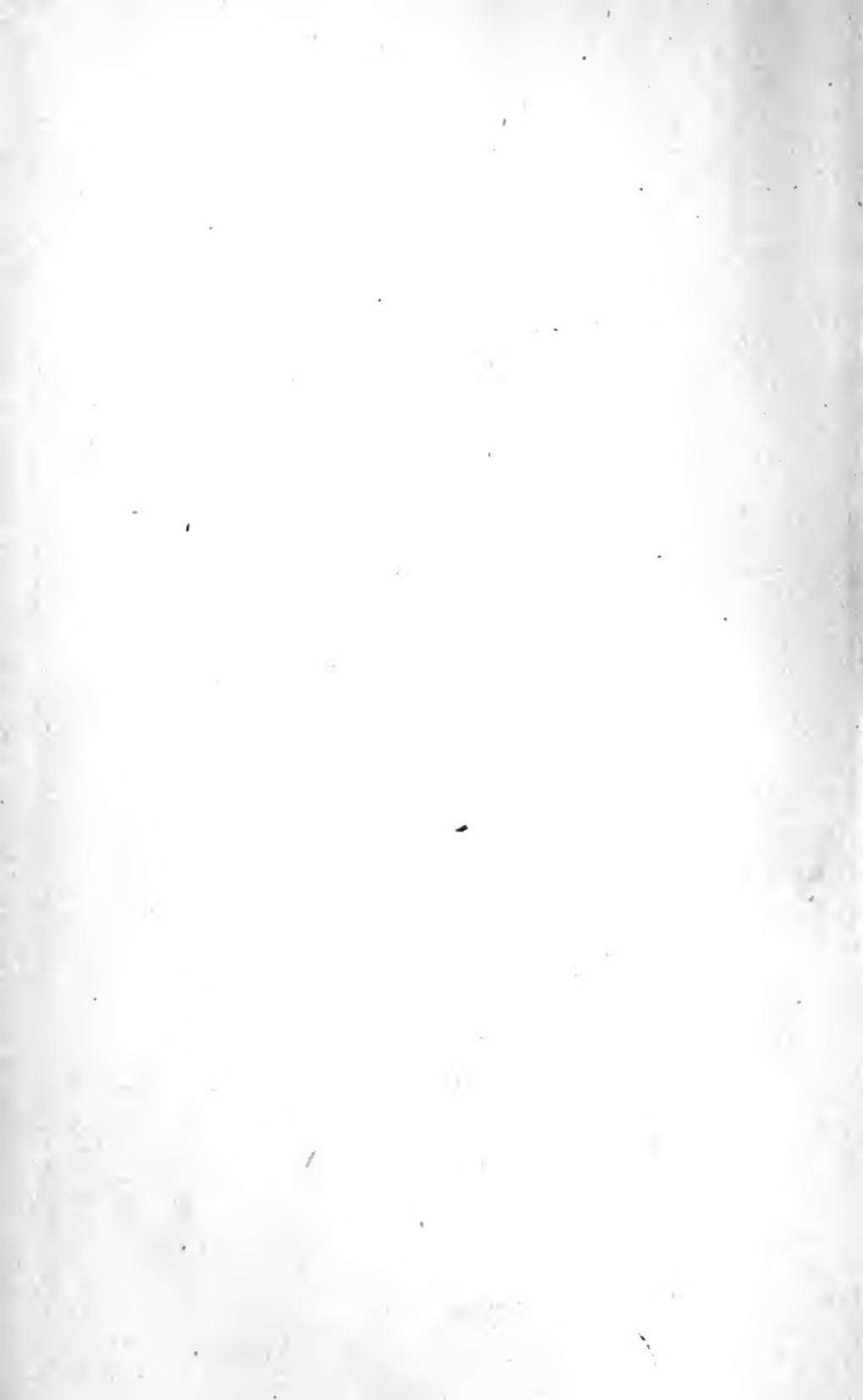
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THE PLACE  
OF JULIUS CÆSAR AMONGST  
THE SERIOUS PLAYS.

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## THE PLACE OF JULIUS CÆSAR AMONGST THE SERIOUS PLAYS.

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WE never see the world as it is. It takes the colour and mould of our own souls. Complete realism is impossible. For that which we see is ever tinged by that with which we see. Our medium is for us creative. Hence we are for ever seeing change, even when change there is none; nature moves with us like our shadow; and human nature, changeable though it is, becomes besides fickle with our moods. Were nature moveless as her rocks, still would she seem to follow our transformations, as we pass from gloom to sunshine, from twilight to deep night. The strong spirit is omnipotent over its own happiness or woe; for it can see the gleaming sunlight behind the darkest cloud. The weak heart lets itself be crushed not by its surroundings, but by its own tears and gloom.

Thus potent as the spirit is with the lights and shadows of the world, there are sure to be seasons and periods as there are days and nights in its history. The inexperienced, unburdened soul of childhood gives to its whole world the colour of its physical states, its bodily pains and anguishes, or its bodily pleasures and ecstasies; it takes little to cast it from noon into outer darkness. Youth is still full of all these quick transitions; its gloom and happiness are strong and sudden and soon erased from memory; no circumstance graves its characters deep across the nature. Its passions, its delights, its griefs, though less dependent on the state of body than in childhood, blaze out and as suddenly die down to embers. Then comes the sober light of manhood, misting the joys and the agonies of life; its tasks have grown routine and dull; for "there hath passed a glory

from the earth." ; the round of work from day to day has worn the freshness off the powers ; ashen-grey is the sky ; and the dawns of hope no longer break upon it, turning it into a vault of glory ; all things that stir the blood to great joy have proved but evanescent ; beasts of burden we have grown, all the more lonely and weary of our fate that we have inspirations of a better life. It is only when some great agony comes and racks the whole frame-work of the soul that we burst the hard prison of daily toil and see the far destiny and deep night that stretch out from life ; the despair, the gloom, is appalling, the sadness profound ; and yet there are the stars we saw not before, claiming for us kinship with the everlasting ; even in the dread suffering that oppresses us, we grow conscious of our nobler birth-right and fates ; and when its bitter ecstasy is past, there is a wisdom in the life we had not known before ; we look upon the round of duty, the rush for pleasure, and the low mist of suffering that hangs over our natures, like a traveller from lands of beauty who rests upon a hill and overlooks the moil and darkness of a smoke-beclouded city ; he knows it and yet is not part of it ; he has toiled in its grime and smoke, but he now has memories of nobler ways and men.

And when the grey twilight of age is deepening around us, the pains and pleasures of life grow dimmer ; the tissues feel the blows and flatteries of existence as things almost indifferent. And to have suffered and been wise in the suffering is all that raises us above the poor neutrality of sinking into the grave. How strong and noble the agony of the past makes the aged spirit ! It looks back and sees the bewildering crossways of the world clear and separate, each leading to its definite goal. Its interests are detached from the puny cares or passions of the world and it sees as from a mountain-top the dark plain of life where the struggling in which we had taken such eager part seems so petty and mean. And we gladly relinquish our hold upon its seeming good things and issues, feeling the desire of wealth or excitement or fame grow weak if not repulsive. Ah, then it is much that we have gleaned wisdom from life, and have brought none of its caprices and passions and childishness into this grey evening before death.

To each of these stages of existence how differently tragedy must appear ! There is not continuity enough in the sadness or despairing moods of youth to know sorrow as a reality in life or art. With our quick transitions of joy and grief we have not strength to rest in the rushing current of life. Despair comes but for a brief moment and hope sweeps out even the memory of it. No pain or grief can write its characters deep enough upon the nature to be a long agony. But when manhood comes, the little sorrows and pleasures of life unsettle the mind only for a thought and pass away into the drift of duty and toil. Yet it can be moved so deeply as to feel the whole of life take other hue thenceforth. Even if no agony has fallen with tornado power upon it, it knows that life is capable of such ruin ; for it feels the throb of destructive passions in the atmosphere of human circumstance. It is schooling itself to expect no favour from fate and to suffer the great catastrophe should it come. Tragedy lives for it in every pulsation of the heart. Even the close-horizoned round of toil is tragic in the grey mist that shuts the stars out, and drains the soul of hope. Death picks off the comrade who has laboured by our side, the friend we love most ; and thought with its questioning crumbles our beliefs to dust, as we still cling passionately to them. Treachery creeps round us like an atmosphere and makes us feel life unsafe, unworthy. And all existence seems of tragic stuff to the core. It becomes too much for us to bear, and if we live to see the calmer heights of age rise out of the night and storm, we gladly relinquish all tragic thought and emotion, and try to return to youth's world of romance. But it is no more the same world. It has substance and framework from the sorrows of life, even though it weaves the colours of the dawn and sunset round them. It has risen to the stiller heights of self-knowledge, and the passions and caprices and the race for pleasure that so absorbed the growing mind have vanished. There is still the echo of the moaning sea of tragedy in the wise dreams we dream. Funeral bells chime softly across the troubled sea of manhood and dirges still sound in the ear of the serenest wisdom. Life still has tragic shadow over it.

Shakespeare, more than most men felt the seasons of life and their effect upon tragedy. His spring was full of passionate endeavour to find the happiest life,—a thousand different sowings of seed without the patience to see what would come of them, most of them “wild oats”, none of them without the frantic eagerness and wild caprice of youth. What is recorded by tradition of it has the elements of brief and fitful tragedy in its strong rebellion against convention and law, and flight from its consequences, a thoughtless passion and a lifelong sense of enslavement to its results. All his efforts in his native village to rise above his escapades and the evil reputation they gave him he saw to be in vain. And before his youth had passed into its noon he escaped from his bonds and sought the heart of English life now pulsing with the hot blood of adventurers; he saw that in London alone he might retrieve the lost chances of his boyhood and youth. The wonder is he did not with his vigorous and still wild nature throw himself into the world that all England's best youth were seeking—the world of sea and distant shores of romance, the world of adventure against the bragging Spaniard and his golden conquests. For it was but a year or two before the Armada that he made for London; and expedition after expedition sailed forth to seek the Spanish main or to find new worlds beyond the Atlantic. Hopeless of rising in social or political England, honey-combed as it was with caste and tradition, one would have thought that he was sure to seek this outlet for his venturous spirit and his passionate imagination. But there seems to have been a marvellous sanity in all his life, when once he escaped from the rough experiments of his village youth. And his ambition had been stirred by the actor-bands that had fascinated his young mind as they strolled throughout his native county. He seemed to know instinctively the sphere that would be best for him. And with his new self-control he resisted the tide of adventure that was drawing all youthful England to the West and its new romantic worlds. He joined the vagabond profession of actor, though he must have known the disabilities that attached to it. He saw his sphere was that of passionate thought and only on the stage could he find true utterance for it.

Such a nature and such a commencement of life were sure sooner or later to lead to tragic art. But not for many years did he venture upon that which implied depth of penetration into human nature a mind steadied by great and abiding sorrow and a heart free from the wandering caprices and passions of youth. He saw the young dramatists round him begin their career and make their fame by loud and vaunting tragedies. But he was too sane in his vision not to see beneath the pretentious and shallow art of these popular plays. Nor was he drawn to follow in their footsteps till he had practised his hand and made it skilful in comedy and history. It is true *Titus Andronicus* is attributed to him, and if he had a hand in it, it must come first among his plays. But he probably only touched up some older tragedy; for it has scarcely a mark of the true Shakespearian style. It is full of boastfulness and fury and bloodshed, monotonous in its rhythm, shallow in its philosophy and character, tragic only in being filled with horrors, mutilations, and murders. It is evidence that he began as a botcher of plays or pure imitator. He was drawn for a moment into the current of popular art; but it was only to discover how unreal it was and to abandon it at once. He saw that "to sup full with horrors" was the burlesque of tragedy, as long as it left the characters unscathed in spirit and the audiences unmoved to deep thought upon life.

His first young attempt at the art is *Romeo and Juliet*. And before that came two comedies, (*Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Comedy of Errors*), and the whole of *Henry the Sixth* at least. There is even a doubt whether he did not lay it aside unstaged in 1591 and take it up again in 1596, when his hand was more skilled and his mind fuller of the wisdom of life. This we do know, that he matured his art in comedy and deepened it, and made it more serious in history, before he took up the theme of this tragedy. Yet it has the mark of youth upon it. It is with love it deals—love that is the only source of deep and lasting gloom in youth. He had seen perchance in London or in his native village the fate of star-crossed lovers seeking in death the satisfaction their cruel friends refused to their love. He had himself experienced how capricious, how tragic in

its bonds, the passion is in youth. Many times had he played about the theme with laughter, seeing how often it ended in comedy, seeing how lovers in after years grow thankful that fate had crossed their passion and saved it from the more tragic consummation of an unhappy marriage. He had himself had reason to bewail that the course of true love did with him run smooth and bound him for life in a loveless union. The other side of love's blinding power he now realized, its power of leading hereditary enemies into its trammels. But he chose the hot-blooded land of the South as the scene, Italy with its family vendettas and its early manhoods and womanhoods. He took the two great tragic passions of the South; revenge and love, and brought them into collision. And only such a theme could have suited his early art if it was to deal with tragedy well. For youth and early manhood can realise only brief agonies and brief passions. And the task with him was to keep up the fire of enthusiasm as long as his art needed it. He had seen the repulsive or comic reality of love's consummation and he had to force the comedy of it from his thoughts as he worked. He had to think of the other element of the tragedy—the wild desire of vengeance that wasted the blood of families for generations. This play takes all its solemnity from the sanguinary feud between the Capulets and the Montagues. The bloodshed of the stage only tells us how much has been spilt in the long past and how much will be spilt in the generations to come. And thus Romeo and Juliet is as red with slaughter as Titus Andronicus.

Such tragedy could not satisfy the sane imagination of this poet. He felt it to be shallow and artificial. He knew that tragedy cuts much deeper into life, the tragedy of character and destiny. He saw lives that had never touched bloodshed or been stained with crime bear within them the sadness of desolation from some great spiritual crisis. But he had not the power or experience to fathom them, or bring the history of their souls into his art. For he had not himself yet suffered. He turned away therefore from the serious side of the passion of youth and dealt with it in a joyous and fanciful mood. Around him in life, love was the theme of banter and jest, of amusing caprice and

fantastic entanglement ; his art could not rise above the comedy of the passion. And up to the noon of his manhood he revelled in the quick bright thoughts and emotions that circle round it.

But towards the close of the century we begin to feel a shadow creep into them. All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, and Troilus and Cressida give us the sense of a bitterness in love. He has grown into the habit of dealing with it as comedy ; but the dark threads of sorrow and defeat that had woven themselves into the web of his life intruded on his gauzy fabric. He had come to know that love might, without leading to despair and death, yet overcloud existence. In these three plays the comedy of love approaches as near to tragedy as comedy can come. And in the last the view of it is so cynical and dark, so contemptuous of any truth or constancy or beauty in it, that we might almost range Troilus and Cressida with the tragedies. Its lesson is the most repulsive, most despairing, in all Shakespeare ; it is that there is no goodness or loyalty in love or even in life, and the only man who makes the best of it is the worldly-wise and cynical. If it is comedy, it is the comedy of the midnight of life, whither no gleam of virtue or hope or goodness finds its way. At this stage the poet had lost his path in life, and could see no hand behind the veil, no order in the moral world. And the man who laughs at this loss is further from anything like nobleness than the gloomy sceptic.

A mood like this could not last with a mind so fundamentally wise and sane. He struggled to find sources of laughter in life, but had to retire defeated into the valley of despair. The only thing that saved him from the fate of some of his noblest heroes was the duty that lay before him, the need of having to write for his theatre. His plays gave vent to his emotions, and thus he could endure through the deep night. But tragedy was now the natural form his imagination took. Only tragedy could satisfy his nature now. For a man's art is unreal if it does not take the colour of his life as he works at it. The only true art is woven out of the tissues of the soul ; and the loftier the artist, the more truly do his works indicate the changes that occur in his inner life ; and we may be sure that it was no mere resolve

that made our poet change at this period from comedy to tragedy. For the difference between the two is fundamental.

But the choice of his theme and form to fit the new tragic atmosphere was of course conscious and an effort of will. He had in the midst of his comedy period been maturing and sobering his mind by working in a different material—that of history. Without being tragic, it had much of the hue of sorrow and great purpose. He had drawn from the English chronicles themes that gave him scope for noble and serious work. And now that gloom had settled upon him, it was natural for him to turn to this form that had flitted before his more sombre moods. But he had exhausted all the greater themes of English history, as far as they had attracted him. He desired one of world-wide interest, and he naturally turned to the greatest crisis in all history, the rise of Rome's imperial dream. He found a book ready to his hand,—the translation of Plutarch's Lives by Sir Thomas North. Only the dramatic faculty, not the inventive, would be needed to turn its material into a tragedy. His whole energies might be centred on the spiritual meaning.

Yet this, history though it seems, differs in its spiritual meaning by a whole world from his former plays so called. They were busied with the outward act, the bustle of the senate and the battle-field, and there was no great problem to solve, no great dilemma of the soul to paint. No play could pass from his mind without some tinge of spirituality ; and these are no exception ; for even his life of Falstaff has its shadow and deep meaning. But they do not place the tragic element in the foreground. In Julius Cæsar we feel that the deeds, great and world-influencing though they are, are only contributories to the development of character and the destiny it works towards. It is the degeneration of Cæsar and the dilemma of Brutus in which we are wholly absorbed. The great conqueror has reached a crisis in his spirit, as the republic and the world have reached a crisis in their history ; but the former throws the deepest shadow upon us. He has borne himself as “the foremost man of the world”, nobly and with a self-control that ennobles his career; his friends have seen no weakness in him, though his envious enemies have ; his whole bearing, amid his great successes that would have turned the head of any other man,

has been of the manliest and most unassuming. But the vulgar ambition to be a king has come into his mind. And beneath the corrupting influence, the nobleness of mien is lost, the great thoughts decay, the upright manliness vanishes, and all human weaknesses, bodily and spiritual, gather in his frame. It is a tragedy of the inner man we are watching. And as soon as this earthly personality, and its mean ambitions, and openness to be flattered, has disappeared in blood, the great spirit again rises proud and upright and noble from its ashes and impresses us as it impressed the human race with its majesty. The ruinous force of worldly ambition upon the character and the supremacy and immortality of the soul have engraved themselves deeply in the mind of the poet.

But there is a far more engrossing and saddening problem before him, the conflict of even the virtues in life. The best of men and the best of friends, he felt, are forced by the strange power of destiny to part and take opposing sides. Love and reverence are thrust aside in life that something seemingly nobler may take their place. Patriotism is a loftier virtue than friendship; especially was it so to the Roman mind; for it embraces more of mankind. And yet to wrong the one in order to serve the other will bring the vengeance of injured nature on the pure of heart. Nothing but death can still the gnawing pain within the soul of Brutus; nothing but death can lay the injured spirit of friendship. And the tragedy lies even deeper. For the nobler the mind the greater the risk of mistaken decision in this cruellest of all dilemmas between two virtues, and their loyalties or dishonours. The man who is perfect in the uprightness of his thoughts and dwells within their purity fails in his decisions when the world of action demands them. Even the greatest and wisest of thinkers, if only thinkers, would in the crooked and dark ways of practical life grow bewildered or take rash decision and feel baffled with the result. The quick and confident rashness that leads to ruin and despair is the tragedy painted in Brutus.

The other, the bewilderment and indecision, is taken up in the twin play—Hamlet. There two cruder and more primitive forms of virtue are brought into collision—love and reverence for living relations, and reverence for the

memory of a dead father. The one is weighed down by suspicion and doubt of a mother's purity, the other by doubt of the reality of the apparition and the horror of the duty of revenge. There is great agony in Hamlet as in Brutus over the dilemma; but Brutus comes quickly to decision; and his tragedy lies in the failure of his patriotic effort to satisfy the one virtue and the revenge which the other takes for the outrage on it. Hamlet's tragedy lies in the inability to choose between them, and the sanguinary ending it has. And the horror of it is much deeper. For it is not merely lofty friendship that has to be trampled on, but the closest blood-relationship; and in primitive life this is the most sacred of things. In Roman life a love of the state had superseded it and in the last Grecised days of the republic the love of friend for friend. There is thus far greater passion in the tragedy of Hamlet, although it is like Julius Cæsar a tragedy of the intellectual element. It has not the cold and formal gait of the latter. Its thoughts have the force of a torrent, bearing down even the pales of reason. And though in both the haunting power of a thought over the soul induces a hallucination, in Brutus it has but a momentary effect on the senses, in Hamlet it dwells upon them like a nightmare and masters all the nerves and passions, driving him into madness. The atmosphere of the one is coldly pure, of the other electric and stormy, clouding the vision of the other world in doubt and gloom, and flashing evanescent revelations of the crimes and woes upon the earth. The art of the later play is therefore wilder and more irregular as being Teutonic art, and its whole philosophy is farther-reaching and more mystical. It is the transition from tragic intellectualism to tragic passion. It was natural that the poet should place stern self-restraint upon his imagination as he passed out of comedy into the region of great tragedy, lest it should fall into melodrama as it had done in *Titus Andronicus* and threatened to do in *Romeo and Juliet*. He could not trust himself, in his new sorrows and growing doubts of life, to give full scope to all his energies at first. He had to feel his way.

At last he gave himself up without restraint to tragic passion. His *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* make one phase in his life and art, the phase of despair beneath the broken

bonds of life and the masterfulness of its evil elements. In Othello unmotived wickedness takes form in Iago and bewilders the simple and manly nature of the half-civilised Moor ; and yet it is only the manners and conventions of society it appears with ; Iago is in his bodily nature and superficial emotions and thoughts the man of fashion, such as the poet must have met daily in London ; he differs nothing, not even in the appeal to honesty, from the every-day mien of social life. And the poet had found in his experience that it was the fate of noble instinct and purpose to suffer from the conventions and forms of daily intercourse, in as much as they can so easily mask the diabolic nature or purpose. The guileless fancy of a loving husband is the easy prey of this plotting, intriguing, social power and is brought to believe a lie. But it does not destroy his love for Desdemona ; it only intensifies it into a resolution to hide the polluted memory in death. But before he steps into the grave, the pollution vanishes ; the noble nature is triumphant ; for he takes with him renewed belief in the purity of his wife.

Still more terrible and titanic is the passion of Lear, and still closer it makes its approach to the victory of evil. The bonds that tie child to father are burst ; and treachery and wickedness sweep on triumphant over the rights of brother, husband, country, trampling reason in the dust. Truth, loyalty, love, reverence, gratitude, purity, all that make life beautiful and noble, lie prostrate in blood, and human existence seems the very curse of the earth. But one gleam of hope lights up the whole horizon before the tragedy closes. Kent the loyal, Edgar the filial, Albany the merciful win the day ; and though Lear and Cordelia die, it is in the ecstasy of returning truth and love and faith.

Again in Macbeth he goes back to the elements of his Julius Caesar, but it is in more passionate mood. Kingship and ambition, loyalty and friendship appear again, but in different form. It is no longer the conflict between virtue and vice, but between vice and vice, between ambition and the risks of crime. It is no longer waged in the sphere of thought, but within a wild and passionate imagination. Brutus is all intellect, and high principle based on the noblest thought. Macbeth is all imagination that is almost

neutral in morality. The ambition in the one play lies in a different breast from the competing principle. That in the Scottish tragedy is within the breast of him who takes the life of his friend and king. And the tragedy consists in the rapid mouldering away of all that Macbeth desires or reverences in life through his ill-weaved crimes ; his ambition utterly destroys its own objects. Happiness, love, friendship, loyalty, even power and courage crumble to dust in his blood-stained fingers that reach out to clutch them. Long before his final defeat he “gins to be aweary of the sun” and thinks that “all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.”

His Antony and his Coriolanus reveal again the tragic limits to imperial and political ambition. The one finds his aspirations and his loyalty to country and empire clash with voluptuous pleasure and crumble aimlessly away before it. The other finds them clash with pride and the collision leads to exile and death. And last of all in Timon of Athens his tragic melancholy culminates ; the wreck of fortune and gratitude and friendship drives a noble heart into hate of all mankind. Evil and enmity are here triumphant, and we see no gleam of hope athwart Timon’s grave. Despair and doubt can go no farther in this life.

And this is the final term of Shakespeare’s dark mood. Down into the lowest depth of the valley of the shadow of death has he penetrated. And strange to say it is here that light begins to break. He can bear the gloom no more. And out of it he moves up into the wise twilight of romance, yet still with the marks of the grave-clothes upon him. We know from the shadow that lurks even in his smile that he has seen the dark shrine of the mystery of life. He will not have the gross realism of humanity again, but throws around it the halo of an ideal world. His Cymbeline, his Winter’s Tale, and his Tempest have a tragic vein in them ; but through it runs the pure gold of human trust and purity. We hear the sound of joy and laughter in them ; but it is softened by sadness and a certain distance from the real world. He knows that evil exists and still works havoc amongst men ; but he will never again fix his eye on that alone. There is a nobler faith. And the poet’s story is the story of all who have suffered. There is no mighty pang within the heart

of youth. Their agonies are but passions baffled for a moment. Their tears are but an April shower that mists life for a brief space and leaves it shining as before. They cannot realize the storms that wreck the whole purpose of existence and leave it furrowed with deep care, and blanched of all hope, or wise with suffering. They think when their desire falls short of its goal that life is hopeless and unworthy ; but another comes to take its place and their blank despair is all-forgotten. Their natures are still like the sands of the shore that bear only for a tide the ripple-marks of the unresting sea. In the moment of defeated passion, if their will be strong, they would rush into the arms of death ; but their resolve is as evanescent as a cloud across the summer sun. Let it pass and the world will seem almost as fair and death as distant. After a few months or a few years we look back and wonder how it ever seemed so near a tragedy for us ; it appears then but melodrama. If only Romeo and Juliet had passed the tragic moment and entered the proverbial cottage of love, how soon the disillusionment would have come ! No better way of crushing a youthful passion or appetite than by giving it the surfeit it desires. The most terrible punishment that could be meted out to it would be to tie it down for life to the object longed for. The youthful ego feels the whole world centred in itself, and its deepest woe is the collision with others, the sense that it cannot be omnipotent in life. Only when it enters into manhood does it recognise that it must yield and satisfy itself with but a meagre share of the earth and its fulness. Even though great agony may never touch it, this is the discipline it must encounter ; and at the last it is fain to think that six foot is all its share of earth.

The poet felt no longing to return to the rash contempt and egotism of his early life. He knew its bright outlook, its flush of dawning passion, its delight at seeing the new-risen glories of the world. He remembered its numberless longings, ever fed by the hope of being satisfied. It seemed to him beautiful as a morn of spring, with the forces of life surging up in wild exhilaration, the thought of weariness or limit to energy or enjoyment vanished, every voice that nature has singing a song of triumph and welcome, all existence but the servitor of his joy. For it is from the

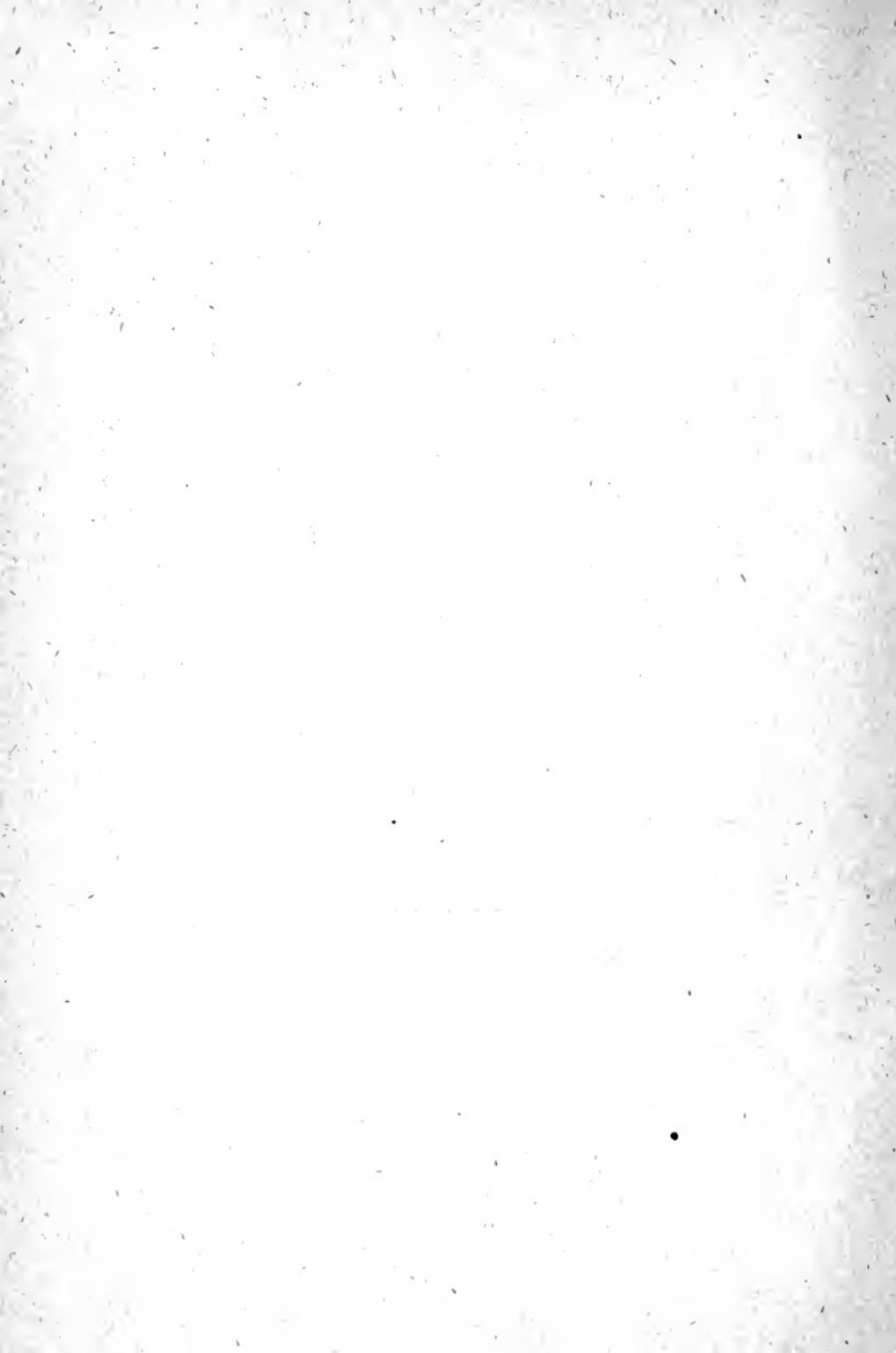
sunset hills of later manhood that spring and youth and dawn are the most lovely things of existence ; while it is youth that loves the autumn, whose yellowing leaves are only golden possibilities, and no foretaste of death, whose forests with their gaunt boughs and decaying fruit tell not of the grave but of the crisp winter and the re-awakening spring. The autumn sadness of life looks back with fond memory to the phases of nature that have no thought of death in them.

But he would not be deluded by this happy magic ; he knew the crudenesses and egotisms of the far past and the cruel discipline that was needed to drive them from. He knew the shallow and intolerant views of life, the ignorant scorn, the mock-tragic airs, the stumbling footsteps of that early period ; and he knew the agonies that lay between, the long and dreary deserts of fruitless effort, the disillusionings, the clash of interests, the baffling power of fate, the toils of cunning and deceit, the constant sullyng of ideals. He knew the vain and artificial scepticisms and melodramas of youth, its weak pretences of knowledge, its transparent self-delusions, its poor vanities and brief ambitions. And he would have none of it, even should he have it as the gift of heaven. He felt with Tithonus how cruel would be the immortality of youthful loves and passions. Better the sad wisdom of manhood and even of age, if only it be still and self-restraining.

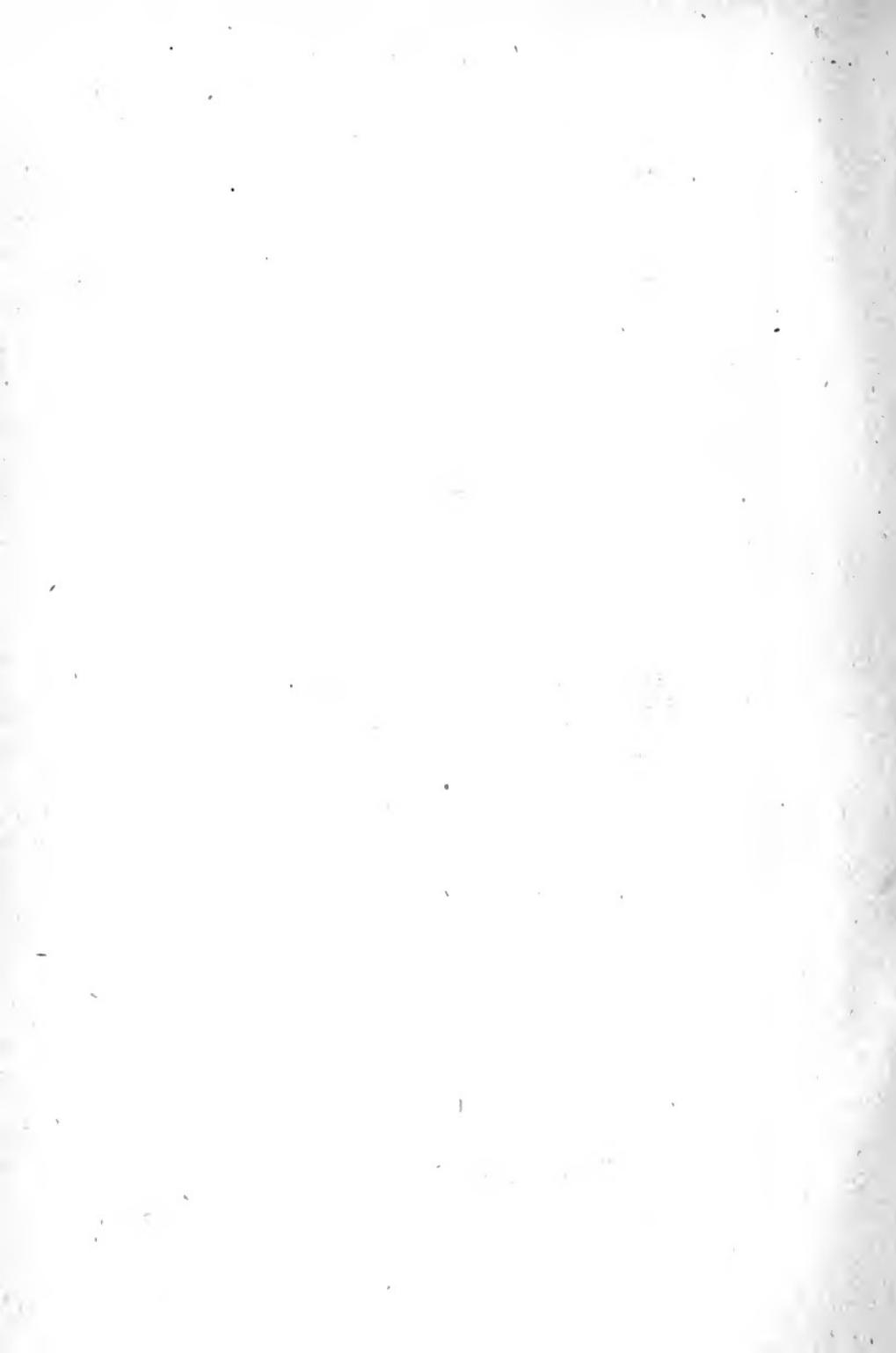
How fair and wisely pitiful is the spirit of his *Tempest* ! He stands like his Prospero with the consciousness of the long years of tragedy upon him. The little island of his life is all his own but for the Caliban force of slanderous tongues and venomous minds that are so easily subdued by ignoring them. Around him lie the falling leaves of autumn, his abandoned ideals, his past illusions and snares. Beside him in the glades and meadows of his youth paces his daughter, beautiful, yet piteous in her innocent babble about the world unknown. In his hand he bears the wand of memory that conjures up or banishes the spirits of the past. He has no bitterness for his wrongs, only pity and sorrow. He will have no revenges ; for he knows the torment and self-ruin that come from vengeance satisfied, and he knows the passionate desires of men that make

them the prey of evil. And as he thinks of the undeserved injuries worked on his life in former years, the old passion surges up ; but in his mute wisdom he curbs it and returns to the calm introspection of his isolated soul. "The world is too much with us," and he is wisest who retreats from her cunning snares and lives his life apart, heedless of the unmeaning broil and struggle for pelf and brief dignities. He would not give his peace of soul for all the kingdoms of the world, for all the hopes of youth and all their satisfactions too. His period of tragedy had taught him this, that we never can mingle with the world and not be of it, that if we touch its polluted aims and methods, our whole nature must be polluted too. The pure soul of Brutus could not share in conspiracy and remain untainted. Not the noblest intention can purify that which is base ; the grossness of the ignoble "will have weight to drag it down". Happiness, peace, even wisdom moulders away and vanishes beneath the touch of the foul element of life.

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## THE ROMAN PLAYS.



## THE ROMAN PLAYS.

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THE theme of an artist's work has a strange reactive force upon his genius. He chooses that which suits him and which suits his age and his circle of admirers. And the very choice reveals to him a new desire or embryo tendency within his nature, especially if it is a new sphere he chooses ; there is a longing after something different from that which he has worked at ; he has exhausted some vein and he is weary of it, even though his audience still applauds and asks for more of it. If he has strength of character and knows the limits of his powers he will rebel against his clients and their admiration forcing him as they do to bind himself to one round of themes ; he will not be Frankenstein and raise his creations into a monster that defies his control and crushes the heart and independence out of him. A change of scene is a sign of such rebellion with a successful artist.

We can see how the painter of landscape changes his whole style and mode of colouring, when he passes from lowland to mountain scenery, or from land to sea ; he must have different moods for the still-meadowed, silver-channelled plain, for the deep-shadowed, cloud-mystic peaks, and for the restless far-ravelling element. How the touch of the mediaeval painter changed when he passed from the mild-eyed, soft-cheeked Madonnas to the tortured, arrow-stuck St. Sebastians or to the world-weary, thorn-crowned head of the crucified ! The atmospheres of matron-joy and of holy pain seem to belong to different stars ; the one is that of an ecstatic paradise, the other an unresting mist of agony. No painter could depict the two in the same state of mind, without defeating his aim ; as well might the sailor manage his ship with the same tactics on a peaceful windless ocean and amid storm-rent billows that break in pale rage upon the rocky coast he nears. The passion and all the way of spiritual life must differ. In the one the artist's mind

must be still and contemplative, in the other his whole frame must quiver with the hurricane of passion that seethes within it.

And if this is true of the painter, how much more true of the literary artist who deals with a material that is closer to the spirit ! His colours are emotions and the words that are saturated with them ; and his canvas is the imaginations of other men. No grosser pigments clog his mind than language which is the immediate product of mind. His whole spirit then is open to the influence of his themes ; if they are sanguinary then will his thoughts be red with blood ; if they are amorous, then will he carol only love-songs ; if they be lofty and historical then will his emotions move majestically ; if they be humble and dwell amid the busy haunts of daily life, then will his soul stoop and be lowly. He cannot resist the atmosphere he enters ; and only the greatest has sufficient power over it to view it from above.

It is Shakespeare amongst authors that is least subdued by the material he works in. For his choice is too creative to permit the subject when chosen to master his spirit completely. And yet he was a product as well as a moulder of the dramatic fashion of his day. The taste that ruled his audience he had to cater for, or his theatre would not have succeeded. He began, like Marlowe and the young university men that preceded him, with sanguinary melodrama ; he passed through the fashion of fanciful comedy and comedy of incident like Greene and Peele ; he found the jubilant mood that immediately followed the Armada press him more and more into joyous comedy, whilst the triumphant patriotism that the defeat of Philip engendered in England drew him back into the annals of his country ; and as the shadows gathered over the close of the century and the last years of Elizabeth a tragic mood came over him and and over all English drama.

It must then have been some theatrical fashion of the new century that was the immediate motive of his Roman plays. And we see that Webster was producing his Appius and Virginia and Ben Jonson his Catiline and his Sejanus ; whilst other dramatists of inferior power were putting on the stage other portions of Roman history. In the sadness

that fell upon Englishmen at the close of Elizabeth's reign and amid the rumours of dissension and war that disturbed them, their thoughts naturally turned to the most explicit and greatest of all political histories to study its rebellions and civil wars, its heroes and its mobs. On its pages they could see written in large letters the obscure indications of their own times. By its means they might show to their countrymen without fear of the court the meaning of the political movements that were beginning to seethe in their hearts. Perchance rebellions and civil wars might be checked by the warnings thus conveyed.

When James I. came to the throne the lessons were no less needed ; for he was an unwise king and had an unwise court around him ; and discontent was shaping itself into something more definite in the hearts of the sober middle classes. Moreover the court still led the patronage of the theatre and following their sovereign indulged in a great pretence of learning ; instead of as in the previous reign catching the spirit of Latin authors, they played with Latin words and phrases ; they prided themselves on their knowledge of the originals, and insisted with great pedantry on exactness even in the drama. Hence it is that Ben Jonson weaves into his *Sejanus* the very words of Tacitus and adds to the text notes and references by which the courtiers and the king might see for themselves that he had been accurate.

Shakespeare could do nothing of this; he knew too little Latin to go to the originals, and he had to trust to translations for the material of his plays. Yet he was so far influenced by the prevailing fashion as to turn to Rome for his themes. And he had the genius to choose those that had become of world-wide interest and those that taught the political lesson of the hour. It was before Elizabeth died that he first turned to Roman themes and the change of century with its glorious and stormy past stretched out behind and its lowering sky spread over him in front led him naturally to the turning-point of the ancient world, to the meeting-place of two great eras. The great sovereign that had guided the destiny of England through such tempest and gloom was now losing her hold upon her subjects and her life ; and plots and rumours of plots seethed around her.

Over the century that was dying with her he glanced and saw the horrors they had passed through, the dangers they had evaded in their weary pilgrimages. Another century was opening, and what was it to bring? Doubtless storm and fury, horrors and dangers too; and would the pilgrimage be as successful, as glorious? Its dawn seemed clouded and hopeless. It held within it he knew not how much of tyranny and rebellion. He would turn to the past and know what lesson its most decisive history had to teach. He would see for himself the growth, culmination, and fall of the noblest rebellion in history, the rebellion that seemed to bear in it all that was patriotic and great in Rome. Their queen had been doing many things that reminded him of the last days of Julius Cæsar; his patron Essex her greatest friend had rebelled, like Brutus and Cassius, and, like them, had fallen. Her strong hand had grown despotic without adding to its strength; discontent had passed into disloyalty, and men were beginning to forget the glories of her reign. Perchance the lesson of history well taught upon the stage would prevent a bloody consummation.

Nothing was more natural than that he should choose in the first year of the seventeenth century the theme of Julius Cæsar's death. He would shew the courtiers in London that nothing could bind down upon them so firmly the chains of growing absolutism as the assassination of its greatest representative and the task was an easy one; for there was it spread before him in the pages of Plutarch. He had only to bring the characters into darker relief and emphasise the spiritual effect of the world-resounding deed. Thus he thrust into the foreground the finest nature of all the conspirators; he gathered into the noble Brutus all the noblest features of Roman republicanism; Cassius he made the representative of the best and most upright amongst the worldly-wise; the rest of them he left in vague outline as but the rank and file, the poor parasites and traitors of rebellion. And he worked out in bold relief the effect of conspiracy upon the loftiest natures, even where there was a true case of usurpation and the usurper was about to trample under foot all the best traditions of his country.

Elizabeth was trying to strengthen her weakness by growing more despotic. And there was a like degeneration

in Cæsar's nature before he put on the mien of the Eastern despot. Yet all assassination did against his tyranny was to rid his spirit of its weaknesses and make it omnipotent in the form of Cæsarism. And was not Elizabeth a legitimate sovereign, the representative of the best political tradition of the country? Would not her assassination but rouse all patriotism against the rebels and sanctify her despotic spirit with the halo of martyrdom? And this would rivet for ever on the limbs of Englishmen the fetters she had lately forged. He would emphasise the weakness of Cæsar and the greatness of Brutus that the lesson might be forced more deeply home.

In working at this political and ethical purpose he found his material react upon his art. Though he paid no attention to the unities nor consciously followed the rules of classical art, this play approaches more nearly to a Greek tragedy in its exclusion of humour, its introduction of the fury or spirit of revenge, its unfigurative strength of diction, and its statuesque art than any other of his tragedies. There is none of the exuberance of wisdom and poetry, none of the overflow of thought and character, none of the tragic humour that we find in Hamlet or Lear. We see him holding the rein upon his imagination. His passion never overcomes him or leads him to heights whence he may contemplate all existence and its deeper problems. He was too absorbed in realising a state of society and a form of character so different from what he knew and worked in to give expression to the racking thoughts that were beginning to harass his nature.

He turned therefore to his native art as soon as he had finished this play, and he gave free utterance to all the brooding melancholy that had now settled on him. Nothing but Gothic art with its striking contrasts, its uncurbed and natural forms, its wild strength, its devotion to the inner thought and feeling, and its noble expression for the greater elements of life could give vent to the sublime imaginings that now filled his mind. History could not satisfy him; it had too many trammels of fact; comedy would seem almost to mock the terror of the thoughts. Only in myth or in vague cloud-like regions of distant history could he find space enough for his imagination. For six years, then, he

opened the sluice-gates of his loftier passions and thoughts and let them flow like a torrent into his Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Macbeth—the greatest tragedies that have ever been penned.

But even the strongest imagination comes to be weary of one vein ; it flags and droops and feels the strength go from it, if it dwells too long in the region of midnight and storm. To rest it and curb it he naturally turned back again in 1607 to that which had in his pre-tragic mood disciplined his genius and art—Roman history. But his passions were still too fervid to find congenial work at first in the cold statuesque forms of the purest classic drama, or in the frigid material of Roman purity and stoicism. He would seek his new sphere where Orientalism mingled with Latin civilisation and gave it mystic passion. He would paint the mighty power and the manners and character of Rome as it began to melt into eastern luxury. The old sternness and purity were beginning to vanish as her conquests touched Africa and Asia ; and the republic was now giving way to empire. He had already been deeply interested in the personality and career of Antony, when he had made him so eloquent over the dead body of the mighty Cæsar. The mingling of nobleness and frivolity, of devotion to the conqueror and voluptuousness, in his nature offered a fine field for the study of character. And the lesson it would teach was what the court of James the First now needed. The Southern luxury and Southern vices were rapidly disintegrating all the old English probity and valour around this monarch. And the poet did not see as yet the renovating power that puritanism would have ; it was still an obscure phenomenon, only laughed at by the gay courtiers ; he did not see that it could keep intact the most sober of the old English virtues and hand them on to posterity, when the dissolute nobles were wandering exiles on the Continent. He thought perhaps that he could save these before they fell too far from what was good and true. He would show them how the mighty state of Rome had suffered from this epidemic of luxury. And hence his choice of Antony and Cleopatra as his theme in 1607.

The result is a drama of “infinite variety”, like Cleopatra herself. He gives full play to all the love of beauty and

pleasure that lies in his nature. For years he had lived in the realms of darker tragedy, and this is the wild outburst of revelry that often comes in the midst of the blackest despair. Who has not felt when long restraint and shadow have lain upon the spirit an impatient longing to have done with it all and drain the cup of pleasure to the dregs? And the mood finds its natural expression in "Let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die." If a surfeit of pleasure would only bring everlasting oblivion, how many more would take this easy path out of the valley of the shadow of death! There is an atmosphere of frenzied and voluptuous enjoyment around this play that tells its own story after the series of great and austere tragedies. We almost sicken of the scenes of rapturous passion and of the worlds melting away in wine-cups. The very choice of the theme reveals the spirit of the poet frantically issuing from the long night, eager for any passion, for any pleasure, before he sinks back again into the despair and misanthropy of Timon.

And this mood of frenzy affects the whole art of the play: it is the most irregular, most capricious, of all the poet's dramas; although it is and was meant to be one of his most classical plays, it absolutely spurns the unities and every rule of classical art; he spreads the action over ten years and he makes it zigzag from one quarter of the globe to another with the bewildering swiftness of lightning; he splits up the acts into many brief scenes that do not harmonise, and he introduces actions and dialogues that have no bearing on the plot or the characters; he has several heroes and heroines and he fixes our complete interest in the character and fate of no one of them; he means the destinies to play here with worlds and yet he indulges in the most trivial of humorous scenes. He has taken from his previous tragedies all the license of Gothic art and run this classical material into the wildest and most irregular Teutonic mould. With all its massiveness of effect and greatest of passion, it has ornamentation as grotesque as the gargoyles of mediaeval cathedrals.

But the spirit of the play is still real tragedy. Its theme is not the mere revel of bacchanals playing with empires, but the disintegration of all that made the republic worthy

and able to master the earth. The last act that consummated the great conquest was the first that boded its dissolution. In Julius Caesar we saw Roman heroism lie dead with the mighty corpse at the base of Pompey's pillar, and Roman duty and patriotism fall with Brutus on the field of Philippi. Here we see the last relics of Roman virtue and courage swept away by the flood of Eastern voluptuousness and the stage of the world made ready for the despotism of the empire which lay for centuries passive beneath the foot of some of the weakest and maddest rulers of mankind. Antony has none of the austerity of Roman virtue ; his is one of those neutral moral natures that have simply aesthetic principles to guide them instead of conscience or a sense of what is right. He is the picture of what art and the love of the beautiful alone would do for humanity. He has great thoughts and generous instincts, he is ever struck with the romantic or artistic side of things, he is titanic in his passions, and yet has humour to act as corrective to them. Never had the love of the beautiful so noble a sphere to work in, so triumphant an opportunity of showing its power. And the result is utter collapse of all that is great and worthy in life. This magnificent genius becomes the slave of every whim of a passionately fickle woman, and sees almost without emotion his imperial ambitions and prospects lie wrecked and futile. And it is the cold, calculating, unmartial, puny nature of Octavius that reaps the whole harvest of Roman courage and victory for centuries. The Roman world and all it has mastered sink like Antony into luxurious slavery and then the sleep of death. The Eastern love of beauty and of pleasure have been too much for even the stoicism of this Hercules of nations.

How different the atmosphere of Coriolanus ! The poet grew weary of the sense of decay and death that follows such a revel of pleasure ; he turned from the fall of the Roman republic to its rise that he might discover the secret of its greatness and growth. And he would still find a tragic lesson for the English courtiers whom he knew so well. He had taught them in Julius Cæsar how patriotism that rises in rebellion against the current of events, against a great leader, must fail and do itself greater wrong. He had

taught them in Antony how the indulgence in unbounded pleasure ruins all virtue, all character, all power. And now he would turn their eyes to an evil that was growing around him ; his patrons were nursing within them an overweening pride ; under Elizabeth he had seen them treat with gentleness and respect the claims of the people ; now he heard them express the utmost scorn of all but their own class ; the haughtiness that marked the cavaliers was already making them forget the humanity they had in common with the spurned puritans ; they were already driving the people into a faction that would soon develope into a hostile camp. He saw the chasm that was already opening between the court and the commons, and, though he did not anticipate the steadfastness and capacity the latter would develope in war, he realized the effect of pride on the nature of the nobles and on their position in the state. Lowly and even contemptible as he thought the masses, he knew that they were the underground supports of a nation and that, if they with their loyalty or subservience were removed, the whole fabric would fall into ruins.

He therefore set himself to paint the noblest of the nobles and to work out for him the tragedy of his pride. A weakling, such as he saw so common in James's court, would never bring conviction by his fate to the hearts of the poet's patrons ; they would point to his feebleness and vice as the sources of his fall. Nor would they listen to the moral of the drama if it represented the people as other than contemptible. He chose then the story of one of the most courageous of the old Roman aristocracy, young, and hotblooded, and he lavished on him all the virtues that the English courtiers admired, love of home, reverence for motherhood, generosity, obedience to acknowledged and legitimate superiors, scorn of suppliancy to inferiors, power of eloquence with the faculty of proud silence, strength of will, hatred of all pettiness, and belief in birth and all that birth implies. Coriolanus in fact he made to be the highest representative of the English nobility, with its old traditions of war as the only worthy pursuit and its new creed of the divinity of kingship and birth. He even departed from the portrait given in Plutarch and made him an English cavalier of the early part of the seventeenth century, chivalrous,

scornful, martial in bearing, knowing his own merits yet abhorring the parade of them, unwilling to take part in any but graceful and romantic deeds, and disdaining all politics but those of birth. And into this ideal of an English noble of the Stuart period he put exaggerated pride such as was growing rapidly in his day.

But he had the other side of the picture to paint. He had before introduced the mob in his plays. In Henry the Sixth he had pourtrayed the demagogue Jack Cade and his following with scornful humour. He left them out of his histories thereafter till the century closed, uttering only grave and warning notes concerning their fickleness, as in Henry the Fourth where he speaks of the "many-headed people" and the insecurity of building on "the popular heart". Doubtless he had changed his ideas concerning them because of the Armada, when the commonalty showed such unhesitating valour and steady loyalty. But after the rebellion of Essex he grew more bitter against them again and more contemptuous. In his Julius Cæsar they are introduced worshipping the hero of the hour and changing before the cold or subtle eloquence of any leader, like clouds before the wind. And here he departs from his original and represents them in a far more unfavourable light than Plutarch does. He makes them in their Antony-excited rage cruel and unjust. Whilst with the historian they slay Cinna the poet by mistake, with the dramatist they slay him after they know their mistake. It is manifest that there is more than mere dramatic necessity, more than mere desire to please his noble patrons in this exaggeration of the faults of the people. Undoubtedly he had studied the humours of the mob in the pit of the theatre and he had to bear many a caprice, many an injustice at the hands of these despised groundlings. As a manager and actor and playwright he had seen how cruelly demagogue-ridden they were, how slavishly they followed a clique, and how capriciously they changed their moods. And he naturally chimed in with the new tone of scorn for them which he heard amongst the nobles as they sat on the stage. But he unjustly identified them with the puritan middle class that had been the greatest foe of his profession and prosperity. Hence the bitter scorn with which he treats them in all his

plays, but most of all in those that he wrote in the seventeenth century.

When he came to Coriolanus he saw his best opportunity of venting contempt; and unfavourable as Plutarch is towards the commonalty, the poet far surpasses him in this. The historian, in describing their conduct in those older days of the republic when they withdrew to the Mons Sacer, shows how courageous they often were, how self-restraining and rational and firm in their resistance to the proud despotism of the patricians, how wise they were in obtaining tribunes for themselves to champion their privileges. The poet makes them despicable and mean, cringing before anyone who would take the high hand with them, cowardly and yet arrogant and tyrannical when led by the demagogue tribunes, inconstant, irrational, feeble in brain, and lacking even in common sense. Nor has he any knowledge of the vast difference between the plebeians of the early republic and the mob of later Rome; if anything, he makes the former the more ignorant and capricious and undignified. In the play of the later times it is only the imperious Cleopatra whom he makes to express his lordly English scorn of the rabble, the "shouting varlets";

" Mechanic slaves

With greasy aprons, rules and hammers, shall  
Uplift us to the view : in their thick breaths  
Rank of gross diet shall we be enclouded  
And forced to drink their vapour".

This is exactly the tone of Coriolanus, and it is the tone that a stage nobility would adopt to the groundlings in the ill-ventilated theatres of Shakespeare's time. The mob of imperial Rome was undoubtedly the offscourings of the people, hating to go out to war and seeking only food and amusements. But in the times of the early republic the plebeians were the middle classes trying to get some share in the government of the state, which had been wholly monopolised by the privileged families; they were the armies of Rome that mastered Italy for her and rightly claimed some freedom from the despotism and selfishness of the patricians. They became the ancestry of the aristocrats of later Rome. The poet identifies them with the vile mechanic rabble, and does it almost with his eyes open, as he identifies the puritan middle class and citizens

and yeomen with the class that ever hung upon the outskirts of beggardom.

And thus he satisfies his aristocratic patrons and makes the lesson from the fall of Coriolanus all the more telling. He is willing even to commit a great historical mistake in order to bring the two into the same relationship as the English nobles and the puritan voters and puritan members. He represents his hero as wooing the votes of the rabble for the consulship of a period when only the patricians had the suffrage. Thus he can bring the two together, the proud and lordly nature and the cowering and despicable mob. And the result is the sternest tragedy. The imperious youth, who nurses his pride into monstrous strength, would like a courtier of the Stuarts advocate the destruction of popular privileges, and he is driven into exile by those whom he despises. And the poet is ruthless in his analysis of aristocratic pride ; there is in it, he shows, no true patriotism, but pure egoism ; Coriolanus hating even his own class for refusing to withstand the people turns against his country, and submits to indignities from her foes in order to harm her; and at last yielding to the only emotion that could master his arrogance and selfishness, that of love for his mother, he withdraws and suffers death as a traitor both to his countrymen and to their enemies. The poet had no prescience of the power and dignity the puritans were to develop in later days; but he foresaw the exile and ignominy that awaited the Stuart court if they persisted in the haughty alienation they showed towards the people and their representatives. He saw that the breach would grow wider and the favourites of the king and at last the king be worsted and driven forth.

He heard night call to night across the great deep of history. He heard the past echo with sounds of revolution and exile that told their clear lesson to the years to come. He read with ease the hieroglyph of human passion engraved upon the life around and needed no spirit of prophecy to tell the meaning; for he had only to turn to the page of the past for the key. He saw in the banquet chamber of the Stuarts the handwriting on the wall in letters of fire “Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting”.

For in the court there was wild revel. The gloom and austerity of the last days of Elizabeth had passed into feasting and debauchery. And the time is doubtless reflected in the poet himself. As he had looked back upon the forty years of his life that had lapsed into the irrecoverable past, a mood of despair had fallen on his spirit. The first years of the seventeenth century have no break of sunlight through their cloud. Out of the whirl of London, down in the seclusion of his Stratford home, he felt the monotony of existence, its dull and insignificant routine of duties, press heavily upon his soul ; he was brought face to face with the nakedness of life and was appalled by the meanness of its aims and surroundings. He had laughed before with the gayest and kept down the rebellious questions within him by the comedy of life, or, if serious thoughts would rise, he turned to the annals of his own land and found enjoyment in its great deeds and great men. But now that he was standing on the highest summit of his years and knew the best that existence had to give he felt it to be all vanity ; the merriest of its laughter is but hollow or intended to drown the cries of regret and despair ; its enjoyments are but dust and ashes ; even its austerties are aimless and unsatisfying. Here was he facing the ultimate questions. What is the end of our struggle to be ? Is the world beyond but a myth ? And this world that seems in our ecstasies and exhilarations so noble to us, and this human system that seems so infinite of faculty, what are they but the "quintessence of dust", what are they to come to after the long, agonising, and bloodstained struggle of human history ? Is it all to gleam out and flash into nothingness again like a falling star ? All the agony of unsated ambition and desire, of a father's love tragically beaten down to madness by the heartlessness of children, of a husband's love turned into horror by the subtlety of the demoniac element, of loyalty and friendship wounded and trampled on by like noble virtues, is this to be borne in vain ? Is no crown, not even a crown of thorns, to be won by it when all the life that fills this earth with anguish shall have vanished ? Shall everything that made life worthy vanish with it ? Is even this "brave o'erhanging firmament," this "majestical roof fretted with golden fire," but a "foul congregation of vapours" ?

The thronging thoughts and doubts were enough to make him seek surcease with a "bare bodkin". But the doubt dwelt on both sides of each question ; the possible something after death still gave him pause. But our hearts grow weary of the long and unequal struggle with spiritual sphinxes that live within our mortal frames. Our tissues grow degenerate as the battle prolongs itself through the years. And there comes upon us again with resistless force the old passion for enjoyment ; our self-control seems all so fruitless, our kindness and charity so thankless an attitude to the world, our love of truth and duty so maligned by the daily intercourse of our fellows, our pursuit of virtue so difficult and galling, that we yearn for the intoxications of youthful pleasures again. How often do we see the virtuous self-restraining life grow weary of its virtue and self-restraint just when it seems to reach the zenith of manhood, and turn back to wallow in the passions and vices of the world !

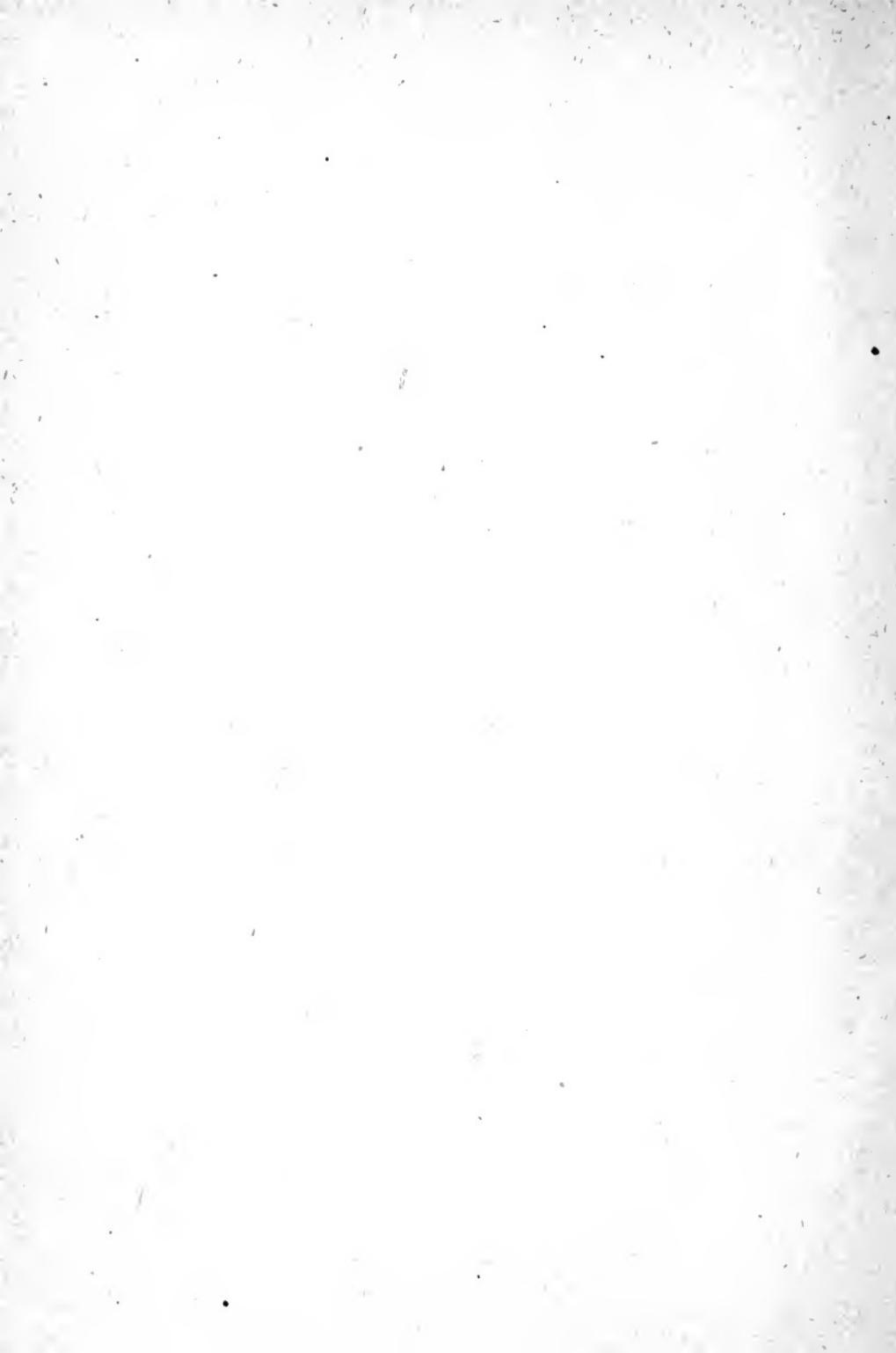
And this is what *Antony and Cleopatra* means in the life of our poet. Worn out by the agony of inward struggle, weary and footsore on the dim upward path that led he knew not whither, he saw the shining levels of young passions again and longed to slake his thirst with another draught of pleasure. He was drawn aside from the steep path of virtue and reclined once more in the bower of Acrasia. The sonnets tell the same story as the play ; a dark-visaged, unlovely, passionate, and subtle woman, another wily Cleopatra, draws him away from the noble life ; and for a space the worlds of his ambition and of his genius melt and fade ; he knows nothing, cares for nothing but the treacherous smile and the seductive tongue ; and his song is " Better love and revel to-day ; to-morrow all things vanish."

But alas the shadow that had so fallen upon his spirit in his tragic doubt and woe still followed him into the riot of life. A wreath of thorns crowned the wine-cup he drank his ecstasy from ; the smile he wooed so fondly tormented him with its fickleness ; the passion he would s'ke his thirst with he found but desert mirage ; deceit and vanity were the very substance of the pleasures he had turned to pursue. All his dignity and nobleness were trampled under

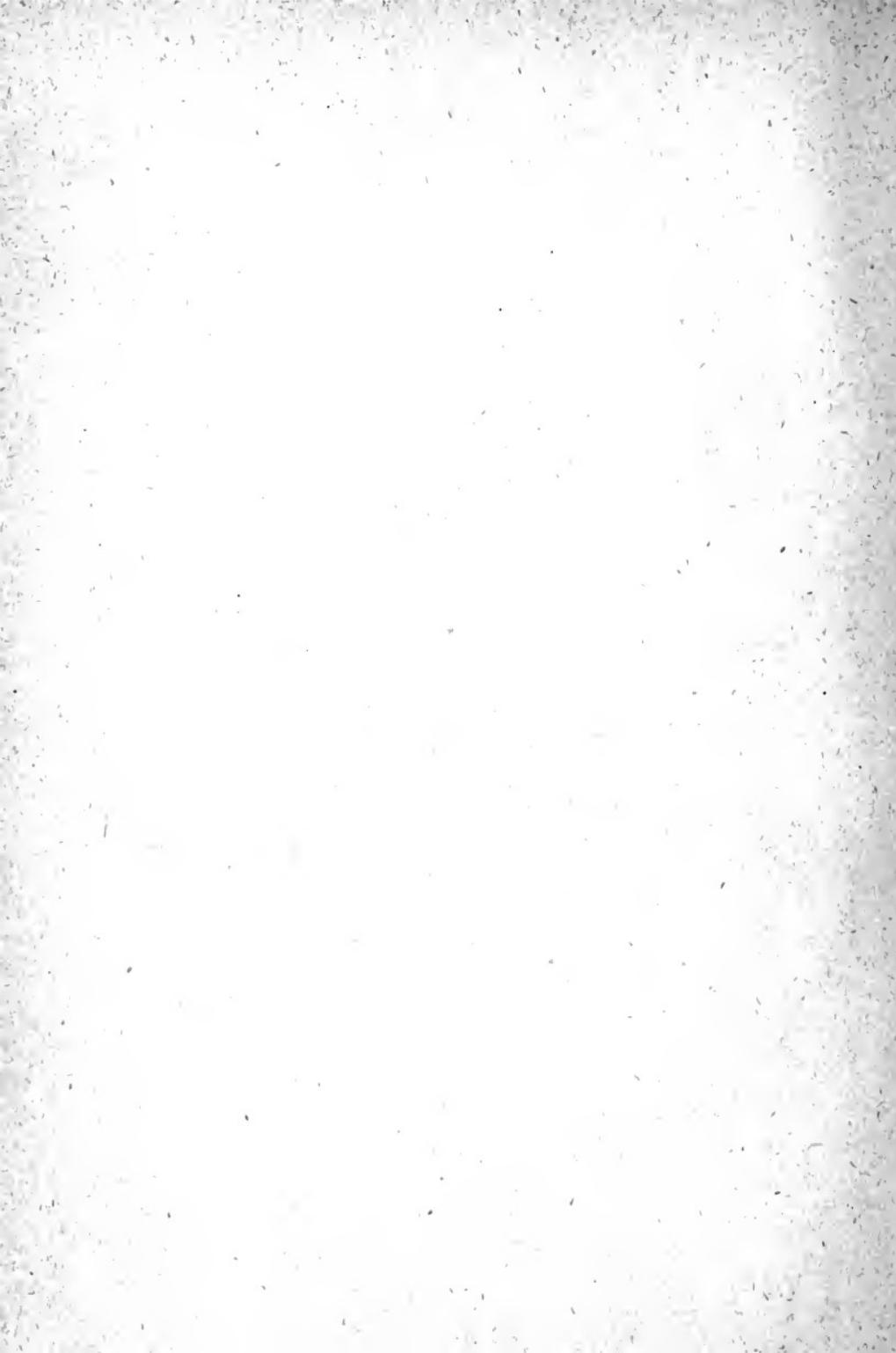
foot by this tempter so vile and yet so seductive ; his manliness and his genius lay shorn of their locks on the lap of this Delilah. And he shrank back again from the loathsome and trustless touch. He would have no more of this siren pleasure. His pride came to his aid ; he would cease to wallow in this mire. He refused to suffer the fate of his Antony and he withdrew into the isolation of his Coriolanus. Austere and scornful in his haughtiness he would have no more parley with this foul Stuart court.

Then the shadow of his isolation fell deeper and deeper on his spirit ; more repulsive grew the world and the gifts it offered ; even human friendship and kindness seemed but broken reeds ; he could scarce trust human word or deed ; life itself became loathsome to him in his great despair of love and loyalty. His Timon shaped itself within his nature ; and he could almost reject with him all the offers of help that life held out to him and curse them as but hypocrisy. Friendship he had found mere feigning, love mere selfishness and caprice, pleasure but dust and ashes. But he saw the tragedy in Timon's fate ; nor would he permit himself to pass thus in a cloud of misanthropy and loathing into the grave. He would bestir himself and make an ideal world to live in, a world in which he would see the deeds of his fellows in colours of the sunset. Never would he take the shadow without the sunshine ; never look on mankind without the halo of romance.

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SHAKESPEARE AND CLASSICAL  
LEARNING.



## SHAKESPEARE AND CLASSICAL LEARNING.

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WHAT a dreary iteration existence is! The earth's surface is its graveyard and nursery at once. The flowers and grasses and plants shoot out of the soil, tenderly increase, pass into bloom and seed, and then wither and die and their rotted petals and leaves and stalks become the mould for their successors. It is only a difference between seasons and centuries for the giant forests; however noble and great they grow, the time comes when they shall fall and be the soil of other forests to succeed. It is a more painful thought when we come to moving sentient life; and yet it is as true. When we think over the vast geological ages during which animal life with myriad wound and pain and groan has sunk into death only to be forgotten, enriching the soil for after generations, we shrink back from the iteration and woe of living. But the thought becomes loathsome and oppressive, when we reflect that we feed and fatten upon the graveyards of countless ages of beings like ourselves. There is scarcely a foot of the soil of this globe but is mounded over some forgotten dead; and our richest meadows are our greatest battlefields. And this continual dying and corruption is the first condition of continuance of life. Thus the whole of existence is the weary alternation of death and life.

The same law holds in literatures. One dies that another may live. The learning and thought and beauty of one must vanish into the mould of other minds that another may spring up and bloom. What are preceding literatures for, if they do not serve as models and quarries for later writers? It wearies us to think how iterative we are, how like our minds and their products are to the earth and its. The fallen leaves and fruit of one age are the

mould and soil to bear the leaves and fruit of a succeeding age. One race flames out in gorgeous bloom of art and thought and poetry only to fall into shadow again and let another take its place and use the materials and shapes it has so nobly used itself. And each literature means generations of scholars to prepare the old soil for it. They remind us of the work which, Darwin has shown us, earthworms do for the surface of our globe ; these little despised creatures by turning over and hiddenly ploughing every inch of mould loosen and fertilise it and thus prepare it for the rootlets and fibres of the flowers and plants and trees that are to grow upon it. Scholars take the work of great writers of the past and do for it the necessary but humble task of the earthworm ; they turn it over and digest and interpret it till it is fit for the hand of some new imaginative genius.

For this is the consoling thought amid the weary iteration of literature that as the ages pass there is ever some development, or some chance of a new form evolving. Through the geological periods that have passed over the earth, finer and more effective forms of plant and animal life have grown up ; and evolution gives us hope that man will reach stages of civilisation and thought far surpassing what we dream of now. And brightest of all is this hope in art and literature ; for there the spirit has freest scope ; and in the spirit are the loftiest elements of life. Already we have seen new literary forms and types developed ; the novel of our own times is such an advance on the old fable and narrative as the ancients could not have conceived. And in the long future may not the imaginative eye see advances in the spirit and its expressions such as we cannot realise now ? In the spirit it is that

“ Men may rise on stepping stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things ”.

Never has there been a genius who so transformed his material as Shakespeare did. We have no sense of the weariness of the reiteration of literature in him. Even the old wisdom that we recognise as belonging to all ages and all races has a new look in his pages. “ Age cannot wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety ”. He seems by its expression to root it in the humanity that belongs to all

times. He wraps it in an atmosphere that seems to touch the heavens. It has new meanings from every new experience we have. We read a play of his and take one harvest of wisdom from it, something that suits our stage of thought and knowledge of the world. We pass into life and suffer and act, and when we return once more to his page we find it is transformed ; it is now crowded with new meanings and we wonder we had never seen them before ; we find truths in what had been blank. This is what makes his best tragedies kin with human nature itself, capable of new developments and new senses as the world develops.

It is futile then to attack him for plagiarism or to trace in a spirit of depreciation his material to its sources. He took without stint and without ostentation all that came to his hand. It did not matter how near or how often used the material had been, he had no compunction in using it again. Even though it should have been in dramatic form already and acted on the stage, he never hesitated, but, if it suited his purpose, remoulded it. He could not see why a rough hand laid upon some story or character should taboo it for all other artists. In the spirit there is no property except the perfect form ; mutilation, inferior expression is ever theft. And this poet never shrinks from leaving unchanged that which he finds in the shape that satisfies him. He has the supreme instinct of the artist for selection, and knows what to reject and what to adopt. And hence it is that we can find so much that belongs to others in his plays ; and if we had all the obscure and forgotten literature of his day extant we could see much more that it is not properly his. He is a sublime and unblushing borrower.

It has ever been an interesting question then with Shakespearean critics to decide how far the poet has earned the right to borrow, or the supposed right to borrow, which erudition seems to give. His day was one of great but superficial learning, learning that covered wide spaces but did not subtly interpret and explain. For nearly a century Western Europe had been studying and translating the only great literatures it knew—the Greek and Latin. And by the time of the Spanish Armada it had begun to

discriminate the great authors and books from the little, had begun to develop taste in reading. The study of the classics, indeed, had reached that stage at which it began to enslave the second rate type of minds. Already the critics were formulating rules from these great books that would not merely guide but compel the literary spirit. We see in Sir Philip Sydney's Defence of Poetry how even a vigorous and original mind could become enslaved to that which it had come to reverence. Written about 1581 it expresses great scorn for the efforts of the English poetic spirit and ridicules especially the dramatic productions. He has no eye for the greatness of Teutonic art, he cannot see that every spirit, every race, every age must find an expression for itself; and thinks that the rules once formulated by Aristotle were the rules for all time and all genius. He approves of Gorboduc the first English tragedy as far as it reminds him of Seneca for its "stately speeches" and "notable morality"; but he condemns it because it is faulty "in place and time". Then he proceeds to laugh at the anomalies of this kind in the native plays, passing as they do from Asia to Africa and from birth to death in a few minutes.

This is a reference to the famous unities, a doctrine which has played such an important part in the criticism of the drama. It maimed French tragedy by driving the writers into cold and artificial plots and speeches; it made them satisfied with fulfilling the rules and scornful of the idea of gratifying popular taste. The young English dramatists, who came from the universities to write for the London stage just after Sydney wrote this, learned though they were in all classical tradition, paid no attention to his criticism and rules, but affiliated their work to the native art that had existed in the mysteries and miracle plays from the middle ages. Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Kyd, who prepared the drama for the hand of Shakespeare, happily had the courage to set aside the classical tradition they had brought from the universities and thought only of the audience they had in the theatres and the long-formed native taste for mingled comedy and tragedy. They wrote plays that would have made Sydney shudder for their neglect of the unities and all classical rule.

Shakespeare came amongst them to learn his art, with only a country grammar-school education, and only as much of it as a restless truant nature would be likely to absorb, a little Ovid, Virgil, and Terence, a little of some Latin historian, and a good deal of Priscian's and Lilly's grammars. And by the time he had married and come to London perhaps the best of even these meagre acquirements had disappeared. But he brought a marvellous receptivity and a great eagerness to make his way in the world ; and his little learning gave him the humility and readiness to be at first a servant and learner. He was doubtless duly despised by the young university men proud of their new-won attainments.

Before he attempted to follow them as a playwright there is very little doubt he had ambitions as a poet. His *Venus and Adonis* and his *Rape of Lucrece* were probably his first productions, though they were not published till 1593 and 1594 respectively. They have all the crude and sensuous elaboration that was already dying out of his style under the influence of humour when he wrote his earliest comedies. And this was exactly the fashion of the time of the Armada. It had been caught by the earliest Elizabethan poets, Surrey and Wyatt and Gascoigne, and had been continued by Spenser and Daniel. The young nobles who were the patrons of literature vied with each other in poems of this style ; and it is under their wing that Shakespeare tried to issue forth as a poet ; his *Lucrece*, for example, was dedicated to the youthful Earl of Southampton. They were translating Ariosto and Tasso and though Harrington's and Fairfax's translations were not published till 1591 and 1594, they must have been handed about in manuscript long before according to the fashion of the day. And it is the Italian school of elaborate and picturesque narrative and especially these poets that Shakespeare follows in these his first poems. Although the subjects seem to be classical they are really mediaeval versions of classical stories. He may have gone to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for them ; it was not however to the original but to Golding's translation, even though he knew Latin and had manifestly read that Latin poet in the original at school. And his *Venus* is not the goddess of Greek or even of Latin mythology ; she is an

Italian mediaeval wanton, such as the Italian painters so often put upon their canvas, voluptuous, human, and frail. His Lucrece is rather the Christian ideal of chastity, such as we find in Chaucer or Tasso, and not that of the Augustan age such as appears in Ovid. And the style of the poems is marked rather by the forced and elaborate conceits of English euphuism than by the soft but classical fancy of the Latin poet. Imitative and cold though these and his early sonnets were, mere following of a fashion of the day, it was for them he was best known during his lifetime, as we can see from Francis Meres in his *Wit's Treasury*; "the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in the mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, and his sugared sonnets"; whilst Thomas Nash declared that Shakespeare's reputation as a poet was only spoiled by that as a dramatist and that if he had kept himself to the Italian style he might have become greater than Daniel, the first poet of the age.

But the poet knew his own genius and the genius of the age better than these friends and critics of his. He was an actor and he saw the great capacity of the English stage, crude though it still was, for the expression of the new thought and vigour of the time; and he felt that this Italianate poetry was but a court affectation. He resisted the praises and encouragements of his patrons and settled down to the work of his despised profession. And here, like the great and calm genius he was, he made no effort to revolutionise the drama; he was willing to be a humble and obedient disciple at first. He accepted all the traditions of the English theatre; nay, he took existing plays and tinkered them to suit the taste of the day. Though he must have mingled with the courtiers and scholars and wits who sat upon the stage during the performances, and bandied jests and arguments with them in the Mermaid and other taverns, and though they must all have been on the side of classics and classical authority, he took the people and the popular drama as his guide. He must have answered their dogmas on the unities and chorus and separation of comedy and tragedy with a sweet and tolerant laugh, agreeing perhaps with their theory but following the practice that would fill his theatre. Not till he was just bidding farewell to the

English drama, not till he wrote *The Tempest* did he pay any attention to these rules of the ancient theatre that had been so insisted on by the critics and scholars of the time. The action of that beautiful play passes within three hours, about the time that it would take to act on the stage, whilst all its scenes are enacted on the shore of a little island in the ocean. Yet no play is such a contrast in spirit and tone to the drama of Greece and Rome ; it is a romance, a mingling of fact and fancy, comedy and tragedy, the ideal and the real world, sentiment and humour, such as no dramatist of ancient times could possibly have conceived ; it was the pure product of the Teutonic imagination, lawless, yet beautiful and harmonious in its lawlessness. From Richard the Second and almost completely from Macbeth and Julius Cæsar he has excluded his loved humour and thus approached to the ancient idea of tragedy. Whilst from many of his comedies he has excluded all the tragic element, as from *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. But these results were doubtless the mere accidents of the material he had found to hand or the purpose he had in view. He was in fact above hard and fast rule in his art ; theory, maxim, and method he used to suit his artistic aim. And he departed still more from ancient precedent in the sphere of the chorus and character ; his use of the chorus in *Henry V.* and *Pericles* is not as a moraliser as in Seneca and Greek tragedy but as an apologist for the art ; ancient comedy introduced types of character, representatives of great classes of passions and emotions and absurdities, rather than individuals full of living traits and eccentricities ; whilst ancient tragedy caught a character at its moment of volcanic crisis and dramatised it. Ben Jonson followed them. But Shakespeare and most Elizabethan dramatists studied life in its broadness and variety not only for comedy but for tragedy ; and they were not ashamed to violate all the rules that the greatest known literatures and the long centuries between had made sacred.

But they were not averse to digging in the quarries of the past for materials to build into their new Gothic structures. And there was, no quarry like the literature of Greece and Rome. They embellished their plays lavishly with the

treasures they found there. Some of them, like Ben Jonson, even gloried in translating lines and thoughts and passages directly from the originals. Shakespeare was not least ready to take advantage of the privilege, but he evidently thought it superfluous labour to go to the books themselves when he could find their material to hand in his own language translated by others. And it is not in a spirit of scorn or depreciatory criticism that Ben Jonson speaks of his rival's "small Latin and less Greek"; but in a spirit of wonder that he who was so little learned in languages should have been able to surpass all antiquity and appropriate so much of it too. Shakespeare does quote from Latin once or twice, but the quotations are no proof of his knowing more of the language than what he might have got in a Latin grammar and reading book. His two schoolmasters, Holofernes in Love's Labour's Lost and Sir Hugh Evans in The Merry Wives of Windsor, introduce a scrap or two, but only of such a sort as the merest tyro would have on his finger ends; Holofernes is very proud of his "haud credo", "in via", "bis coctus", and "vir sapit qui pauca loquitur"; and Sir Hugh of his "pauca verba". In The Taming of the Shrew he introduces two full quotations, but with a less humorous purpose, though still in connection with teaching; Lucentio woos Bianca under the guise of a schoolmaster and in pretending to translate to her two lines from Ovid he manages to tell her all he wants; "Hic ibat, as I told you before, Simois, I am Lucentio, hic est, son unto Vincentio of Pisa, Sigeia tellus, disguised thus to get your love &c". Tranio his servant, in encouraging him to such wooing, also quotes a line from Terence. These he might well have learned from Lilly's Latin Grammar without ever having had recourse to the originals. So in Titus Andronicus his "terras Astraea reliquit", and in Julius Cæsar his "Et tu Brute" are evidences rather of meagre knowledge of the language than of any scholarship. In all his use of Latin scraps he shows himself no better than a schoolboy who had been trained by pedants like his Holofernes and Sir Hugh Evans.

But he makes constant use of ideas that are to be found in classical writers and he makes constant reference to classical history and mythology. He has indeed manifest

command of all the best classical material that was to be had in his day. And it was the fashion to make great and frequent use of it. But he employs it more frequently and crudely in his earlier plays ; and there is clear and positive evidence for much of it that it was indirectly acquired. Farmer in his essay on the learning of Shakespeare published in 1767 shows how he adopts the mistakes or ambiguities of the translation. North in his translation of Amyot's French translation of Plutarch puts by mistake Lydia for Lybia in the list of kingdoms assigned by Antony to Cleopatra ; the poet follows not Plutarch but this in his *Antony and Cleopatra*. And as an instance of his misunderstandings, North has, in reply to Antony's challenge to single combat, "Cæsar answered that he had many other ways to die", meaning that Antony had better find some other death ; the poet takes the ambiguous "he" to refer to Cæsar and makes Octavius say ;—

" Let the old ruffian know  
I have many other ways to die."

So in *Julius Cæsar* North misled by Amyot mistranslates Plutarch's "gardens across the Tiber" by "on this side Tiber" and the poet follows him. And whole speeches such as that of Coriolanus to Aufidius on entering his house and the appeal of Volumnia against his unpatriotic intentions are but North's translations versified. Plutarch, however, is a Greek author and the poet was doubtless compelled to resort to a translation. But even in the case of Latin authors he did the same, as, for example, in *The Tempest*, the original of Prospero's speech to the spirits beginning

" Ye elves of hills, of standing lakes and groves "

is from Ovid ; but the words used show that he resorted to Golding's translation published in 1567, and not to the original.

They who take up the rôle, a common one in our century, of proving that the poet was a diligent and accurate scholar of the two ancient languages are quite beside the mark. Half the similarities of thought or metaphor or language they point out are the mere coincidences of genius ; "wits jump" ; there is but a limited stock of analogies to

be found in nature and human nature ; and human wisdom is bound to repeat itself in different nations and ages. A large proportion of the similarities again is due to the repetition of common thoughts and figures from age to age and from book to book. Many of the tales and names of classical mythology and history had become the common-places of mediaeval legend and had been to some extent transformed by it as it passed from mouth to mouth or poem to poem ; the salient point was retained, all the rest was changed. This material was revivified and made more accurate at the Renaissance. And Shakespeare picked up a large amount of his classical knowledge from hearing the plays that embodied this half accurate material, or from the poems or prose books he read. Many of his seeming loans from ancient philosophy and his references to ancient philosophers are of this kind—only vaguely accurate—such as the Platonic idea of the music of the spheres so beautifully put by Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*, his frequent reference to the Pythagorean transmigration of souls, his reference to Heraclitus as the weeping philosopher in *The Merchant of Venice*, and his view of Epicurus as a sensuous materialist in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Lear*. Hallam instances the continual Latinisms that appear on his pages, the use of English words in their Latin sense, as a proof of his Latin learning (as, for example, continents in the sense of boundaries and constancy in the sense of consistency) ; but these are only the neologisms of his day ; he was quick to discover and use the whole wealth of the Latinised vocabulary of the Renaissance, just as he was quick to find the treasures of native Saxon. And his Hellenism, which critics discover in his *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*, is like that of Goethe and Schiller who read Greek authors only in translations. Shakespeare got his Hellenism and Latinism largely filtered through Chaucer, Harrington's translation of Ariosto, Fairfax's of Tasso, Florio's of Montaigne's Essays, and Holland's of Pliny's *Natural History*.

He was indeed almost grossly indifferent to the accuracy of his learning or to the truth-likeness of his representation of any people or age. Francis Douce in his *Illustrations of Shakespeare* published last century works out his

anachronisms with great minuteness. A few will illustrate. In *The Comedy of Errors*, whose scene is laid in pre-christian Ephesus, we hear of ducats, marks, an abbess, Henry IV. of France, and America; and Antipholus calls himself a Christian. In *Troilus and Cressida* Hector speaks of Aristotle, Ulysses of Milo of Crotona, and Pandarus of Friday and Sunday. In *Timon of Athens* the guests sit upon stools and speak of paper. Coriolanus wipes his brow with his "mailed hand", and has gloves, handkerchief, and scarfs flung to him by ladies, whilst graves in the "holy churchyard" are spoken of. Antony in the play that bears his name uses freely the names and terms of cards. And in *Julius Cæsar* we hear a clock strike and a tribune attack artisans for walking

" upon a labouring day without the sign  
Of their profession".

But the anachronism is not confined to little facts. The Trojans in *Troilus and Cressida* are mediaeval knights, using all the armour and habits and terms of chivalry. Whilst in the Roman plays the characters are little else than the English of the poet's own day. The sense of historical accuracy in art has been a growth of our own generation; and it is less and less displayed as we go farther back in literature.

But perhaps the best evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge of classical material is to be found in the plays that lay their scenes in ancient times. *The Comedy of Errors*, one of his earliest, is manifestly based upon the *Menaechmi* of Plautus; and it has frequently been argued that, as Warner's translation of that play was not published till 1595, a good many years after the writing of Shakespeare's comedy, the poet must have resorted to the original for his material. But there are evidences in it that the names at least came to him by hearsay and not by reading; Antipholus is clearly a mistake of the ear for Antiphilus, the true Greek name meaning mutually loving; Antipholus of Syracuse is sometimes called Erotes, a mistake for Erraticus, and Antipholus of Ephesus is in the First Folio called Sereptus, evidently a corruption of the epithet "surreptus" or stolen that Plautus gives to one of the twin brothers, although this Antipholus in Shakespeare

is not kidnapped. It is clear that the poet heard some play acted which was founded on that of Plautus, perhaps "The Historie of Error", played before Queen Elizabeth in 1576, but now lost. And *The Comedy of Errors* has more complication than the play of Plautus; for it introduces two servants, Dromios, who are as perplexingly alike as their masters; and it is more human, more poetical, and more full of character.

*Troilus and Cressida* has its immediate source in mediaeval literature; for *Troilus* has almost no place in Homer and there is no such character as *Cressida*. The poet found the story of the lovers in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cresseid*; whilst he took the surroundings and atmosphere from Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Caxton's *Collection of Histories of Troy*. This accounts for the favourable view of the Trojans and the chivalric atmosphere. But in 1598 Chapman published his translation of Homer's *Iliad* and Shakespeare must have read the first seven books at least; for his *Thersites*, *Cassandra*, *Ajax*, and *Achilles* either do not appear in his other sources or appear with different characters. And the whole atmosphere as far as it is not Elizabethan is not Greek but mediaeval. The result is one of his most amusing, cynical, vigorous, and piebald plays. It seems to bear the marks of two periods of his life.

*Timon of Athens* is similarly nondescript in style. Written after the Roman plays and published in 1608, it has rather a Roman than a Greek atmosphere, although the scene is laid in Athens in the age of Pericles. A paragraph in Plutarch's life of Antony gives the hint of it and of the two epitaphs that are taken bodily from North's verse translation of them and inconsistently thrown together by the poet. But there is far more; most of the plot and half the humour and cynicism have their ultimate source in Lucian's *Timon the Misanthrope*. That Shakespeare did not consult the original is clear; and yet there was no translation of it in his day, although there were numerous references to it in the literature of the time. He must have heard or read a play upon the subject; and in 1842 Dyce found an anonymous play called "*Timon*" in manuscript which seems to have been written by some Greek scholar for the colleges or the Inns of Court.

It was in his early youth and manhood that the poet was most anxious to invent his plot or change the story he adopted. *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, the two worst plays attributed to him, and both manifestly belonging to his first stage of authorship, though the latter was retouched and added to,—these borrow far less than his later plays. It is in his Roman plays—*Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*,—coming later in life as they do, that he has least compunction in appropriating from his originals. Plutarch had already made his narratives poetical and ethical so that his pages were ready for dramatisation; it was the incidents and traits illustrative of character or extremely striking that he put together. The poet felt this and saved all the energy he commonly spent on the invention of detail for developing character, for selecting the material, and for giving point to the scenes and speeches. And thus even where he seems to adopt the very words of North's translation he transforms them by their setting. Nowhere is his dramatic genius more apparent than in these plays.

And does he not show the way to later literature? We struggle after complete originality in our age and fail to reach it. We but invent again what has been invented ages before. We spend our strength for naught upon what is better adopted from others. Our critics attack each novelist and bandy the words “plagiarism” and “theft” if any plot or portion of a plot appears to repeat even in the most distant way some previous tale. He knew, age must simply add to age that out of all may come the perfect form. He knew that all the treasures of men's thoughts are found only to adorn the great palace of the future. He knew that in each mind however great there lay but one man's force and if the world were to advance in beauty and in nobleness of art age must join age and race join race in mutual development. No man can stand alone in life or art or thought. No man can be the author of the stuff he works in. Only mankind can create in the true sense of the word, invent the matter as well as the form. He saw that if a man's special power were ever to have scope he must not spend it on the work that other men were fitted for. He had no faculty for spinning the thread of tales; but when spun he could then weave it into a glorious garment to clothe the soul of man.

Nor have we realised how narrow is the faculty of any single man, how grievously it wastes itself on that for which it was not made. Long ages hence—how far it wearies thought to reach—our race perchance shall know the art of distributing the arts, of making each man follow his own career and that alone. Our modern industry, rude and oftentimes degrading though it is, points us the way ; for it apportions processes to faculties, it divides labour up that each who labours may master every detail of what he labours at. All culture in that age to come shall be but the discovery of special faculty and adaptation ; all state direction shall be applied to bringing heredity and education to bear on its development. And we shall have an art that amalgamates all our present arts. One family shall work at one detail of it, another at another ; and the product of it shall be the masterpiece of a generation or a race.

Up till our own period each cultured nation has had but a small nucleus of art-loving people, not much more than could find room in the theatres of their time. And thus all the national genius found its fit channel of address in the recited epic or in the drama. It found its audience in the central city or court. And no great literature before our time has ever taken any other form. Our modern education has enlarged the limits of culture to such width that great imagination has despaired of ever finding any but a tithe of it within the walls of theatres. The flood of art has now submerged our little buildings and had to find some other channel than the oral epic and the acted drama. Some form was needed that would appeal direct to the vast and ever-widening audience. And the novel arose covering both the epic and the drama, and in the unrhymed form of prose, as there was no reciter or actor to be the medium and to need mnemonic aid of fixed and regular lines, and as the wider range of tastes needed a more neutral-tinted, less monotonous form than verse. Thus all the genius and imagination of our age has been drawn into this mode of literary art.

But never can it be the final mode. Science is stepping in to give our senses manifold range. We can listen to the voice of our friend a hundred leagues away. And in no distant age his very form and image, nay his very act and

surrounding will flash out upon our eyes however far removed. All the tones of the sweetest voice, all the smile and expression of the countenance, every gesture will be remirrored across space. And science will supply us with a replica of memory too ; across the abysses of the past it will bring the very life ; time will be annihilated as well as space and all its corrupting power. The living figures of our dead as they moved and gestured in life will come to us at will and the tones of their voices and the words they have spoken in life will be reuttered to us when they themselves have vanished. Thus will science be the true necromancer.

And on these foundations shall be built the final and all-embracing art, the amalgam of painting and sculpture and music, of novel and epic and drama, of eloquence and histrionic power ; and all the artists of a generation shall contribute to one work. For science with her reproductive faculty shall flash the final result into every home throughout the world. On some great level high amongst the mountains shall the drama of a century be enacted ; above shall shine the stars for roof, around for walls the echoing peaks that seem to pierce the vault ; in front the meadows and the cities stretching far to the ocean. And a filmy tissue, impervious to the seasons, yet no obstacle to light and form, shall keep the elements from breaking in upon the scene. Such shall be the theatre of the future and from it shall ray out to every city the thread-like bearers of the final art. Upon the mighty stage the noblest sculptors of the world shall hew the crags into titanic forms, the noblest painters bring the colours of the dawn and sunset, of the spring and autumn, into play, the noblest architects plan out the grouping of the scenery ; and every poet of the age shall have his own song or scene or character to develop, each having faculty different from all the rest ; all the great composers shall bring their genius to bear upon the music ; and a drama of the noblest life shall thus be evolved and enacted upon this stage by all the greatest actors, whose voices shall be

“ propertied  
As all the tuned spheres”.

And all the loftiest eloquence and intellect shall come within the pauses of the drama and tell its inmost thoughts

and all the meaning and philosophy inwoven in the characters and scenes. Out into every circle that desires it shall flash the beauty, the tragedy, the thought, the music, the eloquence, to be recorded for each home in never-dying form, ready at a touch to reappear at any point in its development. A world-art shall thus have a world-audience; no space or time upon the surface of this earth shall limit its powers. Such is the vision of the art and literature to be, such the dream that science with its conquests spreads for us upon the filmy canvas of imagination—no dream beyond realisation, but already half substantial. But alas, when man shall reach this stage, he shall be thinking of his final vanishing from earth; for the time must come when its heat and light and force shall ooze away from it and all its substance wither and shrivel up in space. Perchance the power of flight to other roving planets shall have saved the remnants of our race from doom so tragic.

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THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF JULIUS CÆSAR.



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IT may seem a contradiction in terms to connect the name philosophy with a work of art. For creation is supposed to be the opposite of criticism and incapable of being exercised along with it by the same age or mind, and the abstract is the opposite of the concrete. But it must not be forgotten that criticism is ever implied in creation, and the abstract in the concrete. Genius is held to work without and beyond rule ; and undoubtedly if it tries to follow rules too closely it becomes enslaved to them and fails. But consciously or unconsciously every artist works according to some principles of art and life. He would work either without intelligence or superhumanly if he did not. And from every work of art may be drawn the rules or forms or theories that have guided it, even though its maker would be unable to express these for himself.

And where character is concerned, there is ever a theory of the conduct of life implied. In the novel we can see it plainly ; for there the artist is his own expounder too ; he describes character besides creating it ; and he tells the meaning of his plot besides weaving it. But in the drama there is no expositor, except in the Greek tragedies where the chorus plays that part ; and hence it is thought that the dramatist is completely irresponsible for the sayings of his personages and masks his individuality completely. But that is a wooden production which has not in it the best wisdom of the heart the artist has in him at the time of its making. And he is a strange human being who has not some attitude to life and his fellows and when he writes a drama means to express this attitude. Even those writers of our own day, who profess the creed "Art for art's sake" and try to exclude

all moral purpose from their novels and plays, are in this very act thrusting a theory of life and art upon the world through their productions. There is in every imaginative book a complete record of the attitude of the author's mind towards all the phases of humanity he produces in his characters or scenes or plot.

But it may be said, this is not philosophy : for philosophy is a reasoned system cohering in all its parts. And undoubtedly there is no such system in the drama itself. Yet it is easy to find not only the views of life in it, but, if there is wise thought put into the mouths of its characters, the reasons for these views and their relations to one another. A dramatist of genius will make his personages reason out for themselves the tragic or other positions they find themselves in, and their attitudes to their fellows ; he will make them utter the thoughts on life that have been lying in his own mind and the reasons he has for writing such a play or creating such characters. That is why Shakespeare is so often quoted on the conduct of men and the situations of practical life. And it is the easiest thing in the world to piece together the scattered thoughts and views of a play and make them into the philosophy of the way he looked upon existence at the time.

In primitive literatures the bards must be little conscious of the purpose they serve or the morality they utter ; for they are expressing only the consciousness of their nation and age ; they do not differ enough from their stage of civilization to see their opinions as opinions ; they express them only as instincts not to be questioned, not to be criticised, but to be received like the inspirations of a god. The drama which is the most self-conscious of all forms of poetry is impossible in such ages ; the natural poetic expression is the lyric or the epic. Later poets reflect upon themselves and their lives and the differences that divide them from their neighbours. Criticism then undoubtedly goes along with creation. Thought mingles with emotion, reflection with narrative. And it is only thus when the poetic mind becomes conscious of itself and of the varieties of individuality in life that the drama can arise as an art.

Shakespeare came at this stage in the history of English poetry. It had come to penetrate into the mysteries of

character and to see how it is this that is the very destiny of human life. It had become dissatisfied with the narrative and needed some reflex of the varied forms of existence. The Reformation had already struck out vigorous differences in the individualities of men, or rather had made visible and emphasised those that had lain dormant before. Whilst the new world of adventure had brought out along the coasts of England and in London the freshness and boldness of English natures. Life had come to be varied and striking and worthy of study and reproduction on the stage. Every type of human nature, all its tragedy and comedy, had acquired a new interest. Not only contemporary life, but the great past from the light the new time threw on it, were volumes to be opened and marvelled at day by day. And only the wise eye was needed to see the gathered treasures of philosophy that lay in the human mind.

At first the poet was satisfied with the humours of the life around him and the deeds of the far centuries of English history before. But at the close of the sixteenth century he became conscious of the impulse to seek wider fields and the greater issues of human existence. There were mines of deeper wisdom than he had yet explored. He naturally turned to the great climax of history, to that which marked the boundary between the ancient and the modern world. There was he likely to find the germs of great thought, the stimulus of great emotion. By the very fact that he chose, not the rise of Julius Cæsar, but his assassination and the tragic attempt of the patriotic republicans to turn back the tide of history, we can see it was the world-crisis he was interested in, and not the fate of a man. Had it been the romantic life of the great conqueror he wished to depict, he would not have killed him off by the middle of the play. The vast spaces of time that filled the past, and the movements that stirred the whole civilised world were now the themes of his art. He had begun to think back from his own country's history to the origin of it. And away on the horizon he saw it a land of barbarians connected with civilisation only by the great name of Cæsar who conquered it. He reflected on the rise and fall of great names, and the destinies that guide the course of history. He watched

the tides in the affairs of men and saw the keen and worldly-wise take them at the flood and sail up like bar-bound ships the river havens to their market of fortune ; and others the honest and noble but unworldly like Brutus who in their theorising fail to see their true opportunity and either remain "bound in shallows and in miseries" all the rest of their life, or like him find tragic ruin in the breakers at the haven mouth. But he looked more minutely into the lives of the great and saw weakness and failure where history had found only nobility and power. He discovered the more abiding elements of truth and duty and self-control beneath the glitter and pomp of garish fame. In Cæsar he uncovered the sources of his fall, the feeble will bolstering itself up by arrogance and loud boasting, the desire of the mere baubles and symbols of kingship after having the reality, the tyranny and caprice along with the vainglorious profession of humility, the eager acceptance of flattery along with pretence of superiority to it. The less obtrusive virtues and services of Brutus, though they seemed to fail against the power of the Cæsarian spirit, were in reality the everlasting foundations of the world.

For he had begun to look at history not as the record of a mere nation, but as the self-registering development of mankind. Hitherto he had thought only of England and her more glorious or more tragic crises, with the rest of the world to serve but as background. Now he felt that she was but a little link in the long chain that reached from savagery to the perfect ideal of the future. And viewed from this speculative height the might of Cæsar again lies low as when he lay "marred with traitors" "and none so poor as do him reverence". The loud triumphant lives that with their trumpet-notes seem to fill all the world are but the thunderstorm that awes the heart of man and flashes forth its momentary ruin and brilliancy and then vanishes. It is the quiet forces working their way through the centuries that make the enduring results. The spirit that Brutus and Cassius represented in spite of its temporary failure was that which would persist and raise the human race from height to height, till the ambitions and selfish tyrannies of individual men had sunk into insignificance. It is this thought that is in Shakespeare's mind when he puts the great

outlook on the future of humanity into the words of Cassius;

“ How many ages hence  
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over  
In states unborn and accents yet unknown ! ”

This is the true tone of one who sees down the far vista of time and knows how states are but the individual torch-bearers in the line of ever-growing light that flames along the ages out to the farthest human horizon. Tyrants and conquerors, individual ambitions and desires may seem to break the line by the shadows they throw ; but the destiny of mankind, its love of freedom and advance shall ever rise whether in the form of conspiracy and bloodshed or in that of the silent growth of human thought and emotion, and level their achievements and empires with the dust. History is not a mere pageant of heroes and their triumphs, but the slow, almost unperceived ascent of state above state along the dolorous bloodstained path that leads to the final height of human powers ; and it almost seems the calvary of mankind ; for crimson pools gleam luridly in the sunlight every century or two, and there the millions have shed their innocent blood to quench some lust of power that has grown monstrous and threatens all liberty and progress. Many a time throughout the long future would that scene of revolution have to be reenacted before the bloodstained dream of warrior empires and individual power shall vanish from among men.

And yet over against this view of history we must place his utter scorn of the mob, founded on his belief that they are weak and inconstant, cruel and unjust. They move like mist before the wind : now they are with Pompey, next they applaud Cæsar ; now they foolishly accept Cæsar's coquetting refusal of the crown ; again, when their hero lies dead in his blood, they will have Brutus for their king ; now they think the conspirators are their friends and benefactors, and next minute, hounded on by Antony, they set out to burn their houses and slay them. And with all their fury and passion they have “ hard hearts ” as the tribunes tell them and cowardly souls too ; “ they vanish ” before the anger of the two friends of the dead Pompey “ tongue-tied in their guiltiness.” They are as unjust in their noble impulses as in their ignoble ; stirred by Antony's eloquence to pity and

love for the dead Cæsar they issue forth into the streets to express their emotions in bloodshed and wrecking of houses; and meeting a poet they murder him because he bears the same name as the conspirator. Shakespeare does see the everlasting qualities that appear in undisciplined uneducated crowds of men in all ages ; they are at the mercy of their emotions and of the demagogues that sway them ; they only oscillate from passion to passion and never advance.

But the poet had hardened his heart against them and blinded his mind to their possibilities if only they were educated ; he is here as human as they and cannot forget or forgive their caprices as the pit critics of his plays and his players. Fear and loathing of them had been engrained into him by his long experience and he has his revenge in this and other dramas, fearlessly telling them all he thinks of them. He puts his scorn and disgust especially into the mouth of Casca ; “the rabblement hooted and clapped their chapped hands, and threw up their sweaty night-caps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath that it had almost choked Cæsar” ; “and for mine own part I durst not laugh for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air” ; “If this tagrag people did not clap him and hiss him according as he pleased and displeased them, as they used to do the players in the theatres, I am no true man.” This anachronism shows clearly what was at the bottom of his constant disparagement of the people and his blindness to their merits and their possibilities. He has no mercy, no pity for them in their faults ; he cannot see that if educated and well-to-do like himself they would be as rational even in crowds as the nobles, would be less ungenerous than even a mob of kings ; he cannot see that guided by great men of noble purpose they would themselves be the army of progress, the champions of that which is rational and good.

As it is, he sees only their evil side ; it is they who produce the tyrant ; as Cassius says of Cæsar :—

“ Poor man ! I know he would not be a wolf  
But that the Romans are but sheep.”

Yet he knows the foundation and true principle of democracy, the belief that no man has a right to the despotism over other human spirits ; the clear-sighted though envious Cassius again puts it best ;

“ I had as lief not be as live to be  
In awe of such a thing as I myself.”

And nothing can so well express the surprise of the ultimate man of the future democracy as he looks back on history than this ;

“ Ye gods, it doth amaze me  
A man of such a feeble temper should  
So get the start of the majestic world.”

Envy, democracy, and death are the great levellers. We feel contempt instead of awe for Cæsar after the envious Cassius has spoken ; we rise in indignation against the overbearing ruler, when the democratic Brutus has spoken ; and we feel with Antony to how little a measure “ all the conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils ” of the hero have shrunk, when death has laid him in the dust. But the future shall be the greatest leveller of all, and nothing but thought and art will stand the test of that coming democratic time.

The poet has seen, too, the mischievous effect of unlimited power on its holder. Through Brutus he analyses the tyrant’s heart. This patriot is not touched with the ignoble spirit of the envious. He is too generous and manly to suspect his friend of gross ambition. The suspicion has to be sown in him by some other mind ; but it finds ready soil ; for he has been greatly troubled by thoughts that he could scarcely bring to definite expression ;

“ poor Brutus with himself at war  
Forgets the shows of love to other men.”

But it is not the eloquent reasoning of Cassius that rouses him out of his self-absorption ; it is the sound of the huzzas he hears when the crown is offered to his friend and the long night of agony and struggle between his patriotism and his friendship. Once the suspicion has laid hold of him, he sees as in a flash the ruin that the tyrant’s opportunities will bring in Cæsar’s nature. The removal of every limit from his power will develop all the evil in him ; he will have no check upon his caprices from either above or below him and any one who dares to criticise him will have to disappear. He has watched his friend rise from greatness to greatness, and seen his power of crushing down his feelings in order to gain his ends :

“ I have not known when his affections sway’d  
More than his reason.”

And this is ever the condition of rise to great military or political power ; all natural emotions must be laid aside ; and only reason must be used, reason bent to the one purpose. Now one set of men may be made friends and taken to the bosom till they have served to raise the hero as far as they can ; then he spurns them away as but “ young ambition’s ladder ” and

“ looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend.”

And as soon as all the nation have raised him on their shoulders to the kingship, never once will he think of their prosperity. He will use his power without even the simulation of emotion which he showed before ; unlimited power rejects even pity and tries to show itself above such human weaknesses.

“ The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins  
Remorse from power.”

And that is the picture of Cæsar we have just before the blow falls. “ I spurn thee, like a cur out of my way ” he says to one who had been his equal and companion in arms before ; “ Know Cæsar doth not wrong ”;

“ I do know but one  
That unassailable holds on his rank  
Unshak’d of motion ”;

“ Hence ! wilt thou lift up Olympus ? ” ; these are expressions which show how far he has transcended mere human failings, how near the divine he thinks himself. This was the sting that Brutus prophesied the offering of the crown would bring out in him ; “ It is the bright day that brings forth the adder.” There is nothing but sting left in the human being that thinks he is above his humanity and all limitations. This is the main philosophy of the play ; there is no human soul however noble or brave or great, no being short of the divine, that can be trusted with unlimited power. Brutus was right in his conclusion ; it is best to “ kill him in the shell,” best for himself and best for all mankind. But the conclusion came a little late ; the tyrant was already hatched.

Conspiracy had to slip in to aid good resolution ; and conspiracy is as ruinous a thing as tyranny for what is noble

in man. It leads to shamefacedness and insincerity and lies. It "shames to show its dangerous brow by night, when evils are most free." It dare not "wear its native blackness" "its monstrous visage" unmasked by daylight, else it would be self-revealing and ineffective. Hypocrisy and suspicion, malice and slander must be its auxiliaries. And he who plots must rapidly degenerate into the inhuman, however noble the nature to begin with, however apparently noble the purpose. The poet takes Cassius, as elevated a nature as the practical world produces, wherein expediency is the primary maxim, and along with him Brutus the loftiest of doctrinaires, and sets this poison to work in their characters and, though he shortens the time of the process, we see the havoc it makes. The two friends quarrel almost before their armies. Only the courage and boldness of Portia preserves true wifely bonds with her husband ; yet at last she does herself to death. He sinks his friendship with Cæsar and joins in assassinating him ; and the unclouded, unsuperstitious mind is so tortured and haunted by the vision of the futile wrong to his great friend that in the midnight hour before the battle it shapes itself into an apparition and addresses him ; he thinks it is the weakness of his eyes ; but it is only the weakness of his soul diseased with remorse. And Cassius, though he breathes again in battle, free from the stifling power of envy and conspiracy, though he recovers his manly puritanism so far as to die nobly, yet has to abandon all his ambitions and his epicurean creed too.

But the most tremendous effect of conspiracy is that it never can stop the ruin it begins. Its secrecy and cunning are contagious and seem to taint the very atmosphere. Even if it fails, the means once used become a weapon in the hands of lower and lower social strata. It stirs the power it plots against to wild suspicion and revenge ; a revel of proscription and bloodshed is the result ; innocent and guilty alike fall victims. If successful it is the same ; the conspirators must keep their power by the sanguinary weapons they have used. There is no end to revolution in a state once it has gained its purpose ; it becomes a political habit ; and malcontents have ever the hope of gaining position and power by it.

For imagination is a faculty that leads or misleads in titanic way ; it may belong to the evil side of humanity as well as to the good, and it has the same tempestuous force in both. It is on imagination that conspiracy works ; and it pictures to men the magnificent results of evil means, as it paints the noble effects of good. It is neutral in the world of morality, as far as its own nature is concerned. It is like the atmosphere, the canvas of the dawn and sunset, and the medium of storm and ruin at once. The poet has been thinking much of its nature and place in the soul. He sees in Brutus and in Hamlet its most marvellous power, making them live a life within their own breasts, apart from other men, and realise the ideas of their souls as if embodied to the senses. The one it goads to action which in his sober moods he never would approve ; the other it paralyses by the sense of unreality it leaves upon his spirit. In Brutus we see the hurricane it creates within his bosom ; all his spiritual conflict is "like a phantasma or a hideous dream" ; the spirit that has been born never to die is in wild debate with the senses that are touched with mortality ; the immortal part sees the underlying issues of each course ; the corruptible parts see but the narrow corruptible ends of action ; imagination strengthens both ; and only precipitation into act can allay the insurrection in the state of man. It is imagination makes timid and makes bold ; as Cæsar says :—

"Cowards die many times before their deaths,  
The valiant never taste of death but once" ;

the feeble-hearted paint the terrors of that which is to come ; the noble see only the picture of their own deeds. It fires Antony so frivolous-natured to noble eloquence and noble act. It makes Brutus tender and piteous to his page and urges him to die by his own hand. It makes the lean and restless Cassius into an envious conspirator and leads him in the shape of "hateful error, melancholy's child" to self-slaughter. It draws Cæsar to his fate and makes his memory haunt the minds of the conspirators in revenge. It leads the heroic conqueror Cæsar and the stern and puritanic patriot Cassius to reject belief in all intrusion of the supernatural or chance into human affairs, and then, when failure, looming in the distance, and hovering over seeming success, touches a melancholy vein within them, gives them

up again upon the eve of death to superstition. Even the thorny-humoured Casca, who is so unpoetic in his sneer at all human things that the poet makes him ever speak in prose, feels the power of imagination in the midst of the portents and commotions in nature : with all his roughness he shows himself the most superstitious:

The only character in the whole play that stands clear of its effects is the prosaic, conceited, lukewarm Cicero. He is the incarnation of the pedant and critic who is dissatisfied with most things and people, but will never follow others into remedying the evils or even lead himself. He is the type of the commonplace man who is ever trying to impress his neighbours with his learning and importance, by uttering trite maxims that face both ways, and to seem wise by expressing himself in confidential and futile mystery or in a language not understood by those around him. Like all such busybodies, he is omniscient and cannot bear contradiction or even information. His "ferret and fiery eyes" gleam out when he is crossed. Brutus will not have him told of the conspiracy,

" For he will never follow anything  
That other men begin".

At the great crisis in Roman affairs, when the crown was offered to Cæsar, he "spoke Greek" in order to look wise and yet hide the nothing he had to say ; and his following wagged their heads as if they understood it and ranged high above the unlettered crowd. Such a mind would scorn to be surprised at anything in this so commonplace world ; he knows too much for even nature to astonish him. And thus in the portentous night before the assassination, when the coldly sceptical soul of Cassius is stirred to passion and defiance and the prickly humour and cynicism of Casca is awed into superstition, he assumes the most superior indifference and will not commit himself ; interpretation either way might be quite mistaken : all he will venture on is that "it is a strange-disposed time" and that "this disturbed sky is not to walk in", remarks of the usual type about the weather. It is such "men cautious, old feeble carriions", that along with "priests and cowards" need oaths to spur them on to redress of wrongs. What other fate was there in revolutionary times for such a Mr. Facing-both-ways,

such a “dish of skimmed milk” as Hotspur would have called him, but to vanish by an ignominious death in the proscriptions?

It is lack of imagination that produces souls like this, commonplace and unmoved by the mighty commotions of nature and history. The strong and imaginative characters know how marvellous are the great forces and crises of life. And there is a noble fatalism comes upon their spirits as they see their littleness in presence of destiny and their powerlessness before the approach of death and oblivion. Even the “gamesome” Antony above the corpse of his hero feels how puny are the efforts of man against the dark powers that rule existence;

“The evil that men do lives after them ;  
The good is oft interred with their bones.”

But it is in the other great leaders this sublime fatalism appears most clearly. Cæsar is not free from it even in his most arrogant mood ;

“It seems to me most strange that men should fear,  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
Will come when it will come”.

Cassius has it too ;

“Since the affairs of men rest still uncertain,  
Let's reason with the worst that may befall”.

But it is noblest in Brutus ;

“That we shall die we know ; 'tis but the time  
And drawing days out that men stand upon” ;

and again :

“But it sufficeth that the day will end  
And then the end is known.”

Such undoubtedly was the mood that was now seizing upon the poet's own mind, else he would not have made it so prominent in the greatest characters of this play or given it such a place in Hamlet. He saw the futility of most efforts in life that come into collision with the wills and destinies of others and the oblivion that overtakes the most illustrious of deeds or books. And hence his withdrawal from the London world and its theatrical quarrels and conflicts and his complete indifference to the fate of his plays in print. Before this he had had in his comedies and histories many a sly revenge on his enemies. Now he has no desire to

advertise his successes or his hostile critics ; he is quite unmoved at the pirating of his most popular plays by publishers or at the chance of their vanishing from the eyes of men for ever. It is one of the most striking facts about these great tragedies that their writer should have taken so little trouble to make their merits and their authorship known. Only once in this drama does he struggle against this paralysis that is creeping over his hold of the prizes of existence. And the feebleness of the effort is apparent when we see that he puts the sentiment into the mouth of Cassius as an argument to stir Brutus up to conspiracy ;

“ Men at some time are masters of their fates ;  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.”

There is no heart in this utterance. All his poetry, all his imagination is on the side of fatalism ; he feels that the rewards of human honour and glory and fame are not worth the infinite toil and struggle, the pettiness and injustice that men apply in order to attain to them.

The pageant of life had passed before him and he had mingled in it too. O the glad bright days of youth when he saw it a carnival of frolic and jest ! Then even nature played the clown and masker and gave him forms and characters so twinned that they could deceive the senses of men and fill the world with farce and laughter. He had no call to think or dig deep into the mines of human character. All existence was framed for merriment. Turn whither he would, life offered grotesquerie enough to furnish forth unending feasts of comedy. He had only to pass out into the meadows and the woods and every flower-cup held a fairy incarnation of the spirit of drollery ; there saw he elves antic from bough to bough and play unending tricks upon the humans and upon the fairies too ; in the green soft shade they wrought on lovers' eyes the strangest transformations ; entranced with some flying form, the lids dropped over them in sleep but for a moment, and, when they rose, the love had changed its object. Here amid the scent of flowers and the sheen of summer wings the glamour so fell upon the loveliest forms and sweetest natures, that they scarce knew what they loved, so fair seemed everything ; even the loutish spirit of a country clown had fascinations

for a queenly heart within the glory of this festal world ; there upon "flower beds" he saw the queen of fairies turn, by the power of fancy in the woodland sweetness, the rough face of the dull pumpkin into "amiable cheeks" worthy to be coyed with, the long appendages of his ass's head into "fair large ears" worthy to be kissed and have musk roses stuck in them.

And if a shadow ever crept across the earthly paradise of his youth, it was but the passing cloud that comes from the quickly changing moods of love and vanishes into April tears. The amorous langours of the south might grow too sultry and might need the cleansing power of tempest in the soul. But that was sure to sweep flashlike past and leave the moonlight still silverying the passion-dreamy balconies of Verona, still sweetly sleeping on the thymy banks of Belmont, whilst overhead "the floor of heaven is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold" and rests upon the bridal summits of the Alps that gleam like marble caryatides, and in the air around and from the spheres aloft sweet music melts and echoes through the souls of lovers.

Ay, even in the forest of Arden amid the rigours of the northern winter-wind, whose tooth is so keen and breath so rude and beneath its bitter sky whose sting is so sharp, love still plays the harlequin and life is a masquerade. Through the forest aisles, whose roof-boughs are growing gaunt and bare, whose yellow leaves are rustling down, there rings the sweet long laughter of the free unburdened human soul, even though it come from the throat of exiles who have been wronged and driven forth from their rights, even though the affectations of the world creep into the very jests of the clowns. Still it is merry England, still the banquet of life has no death's head upon its table, still the world keeps holiday, still love is more than hollow caprice.

Even amid the loud fanfare of history the sound of merriment is heard ; its trumpet blasts have mocking echoes ; wassail breaks the solemn ceremony of its high-roofed council halls ; its heroes interval their mighty deeds with revel and wit. Even on the battlefield we hear the unctuous jest and the irreverent quip over the fallen warriors.

But we feel the pleasantries grow strained and boisterous ; a note of unreality mingles with the revel and carouse. And

though in the forest of Windsor we seem again to see the same elves frolic, the same fairies grow sportive and jocund, the same passion play its mad caprices, it is but the hollow mask of jollity and love we see ; the jest is but buffoonery, the festival merriment but a rude or leering saturnalia, and all the passion but the mummery of love. And around the deathbed of the fallen jester gather the cares and sorrows of life ; a silence falls upon the loud carousal, a pathos enters the soul of humour and drollery.

At last the poet sees the death's head grinning amid the banquet of life and the note of his comedies grows solemn and even plaintive. Love is no more the whole of existence ; jest dies down into a faint echo amid the awful thunders of Sinai and the gathering gloom of the century. The wit of his last comedies sounds hollow and quickly passes into almost tragic threnodies on life. We feel he has no further call to deal with the ludicrous vagaries of humanity. His mind is ripe for tragedy.

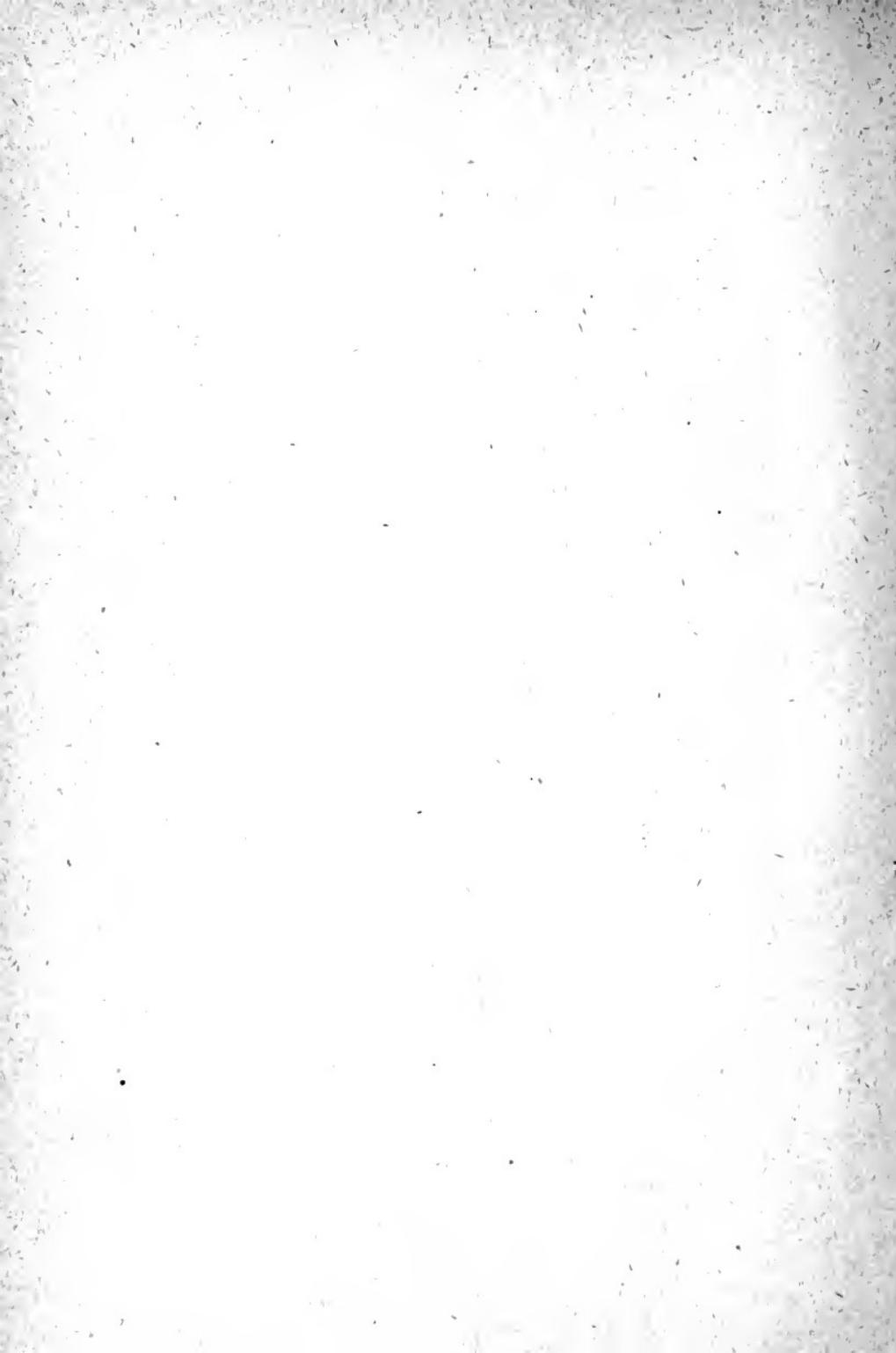
And backward he turns to the greatest era of the world's history, to the names that overshadow all the centuries between and he tries to find the secret of their greatness, the source of their tragedy. Alas ! it is only to uncover still more the horror of life. Weak and arrogant and boastful are even the noblest heroes of the earth. Sad and short-sighted and despairing are even the wisest souls that have lived. Titanic seem the forms that loom out on the far distant horizon of the centuries : but as he approaches them they sink into puny mortals blindly groping in the dark like himself, knowing not the limits or the aims of existence, only dimly trustful of justice and truth and nobleness.

How dark the sky seemed as he saw this flash out, the only result of his search ; not a guiding star in it to throw its kindly light ! On either side of life seemed to rise up the adamantine walls of fate, barring all egress but on the point of "a bare bodkin". "Therein" alone "ye gods, ye make the weak most strong". Behind there rush upon us mortals the sins of our ancestors like demons seeking vengeance ; on this side rise the prison bars of the flesh and its passions and wearinesses, on that the tyrannies of law and convention of custom ; and before stretches into the appalling gloom the unknown wilderness of destiny, with oblivion soon

burying all. Only upwards could he see escape, and there the face of heaven was as iron, unpitying, unrevealing. It is in this spirit he makes his heroes now die. And what was there for man to do but turn in the darkness to his long task and work at his weary round hopeless as a slave at the mill?

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THE ART OF JULIUS CÆSAR.



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WHAT is creation, what originality, is a question that troubles literature much in our own day. A book succeeds and takes the reading public by storm, and at once the critics point to this feature and that borrowed from some other book, and the cry of plagiarism is raised. Encyclopaedias and manuals are not so much open to this attack ; they may use the same material as other books, provided they give it different form and expression. Histories must use their predecessors for the facts and even at times for the order of the facts ; the conclusions from the facts, the general tone and style are all the change we expect. And in books of science and philosophy the work of those that went before must be the basis of the new speculation or system.

It is in books of imagination, novels, plays, and poems that we look for an absolutely new departure. Of course we cannot expect the outer form to be new ; in fact, if they do not adhere to the recognised form they profess to adopt, the critics attack. But the method of adapting the material to the traditional mould must be new. And some would go so far as hold that all the stuff of it should be new-made ; so highly do they estimate the power of imagination, which is undoubtedly the noblest, the most creative faculty. Reason is more formal, more tied down by fact and rule ; it is the clear dividing function of the spirit, and will not have emotion enter and becloud its world. All great passion, all noble enthusiasm is partitioned from it, as well as all prejudice and troubled thought. It can never stir the nature of man to transcend its poor self. It has no half-lights, no tremulous awakings of the heart, no soft and shadowy existence. It is cool and patient and calculating. It cannot leap the gulf that bounds our narrow life or stand amid the spaces of infinity. From solid ground to solid

ground it paces, inapt for flight, unconscious of the cloud-land and the mystery that encircle it.

Imagination seems scarcely to belong to the same sphere of being, it is so unmethodic, so untrammelled by formula or rule or even fact. It lives within the twilight of the gods, and the very dimness of the medium is its virtue; the pettiest of creations looms gigantic in the haze. It has no tremors as it walks the unsubstantial world that is its sphere. It shrinks at no abyss that lies across its path. Time and space are its unmurmuring slaves. Memory and the senses lag wearily behind it. It overleaps the limits of our universe and well-nigh masters all infinity. Beside it the angel of the night seems wingless and still. Its are the visions of the mighty unrecorded past, its are the dreams of all that is to be. We make it almost twin with the creative power that is the uplifting spirit of the endless worlds strewn throughout the night.

We attribute to it almost all the scope that is not purely physical. And when the poet comes to work with it we scarcely brook its lower functions. We expect to see its wonder-working brought into play, its true creative power. And if we see it simply fashion material we know to shapes we know, we speak of it as but a borrower. We forget that human<sup>o</sup> art must halt when following imagination, that expression has not and cannot have its wings and lofty flight. And never has the human soul created in the purest sense of the word, invented material to work with as well as forms to mould it into. It has to satisfy itself with choosing amongst the ideas and facts of the past and adding what new developments and forms it can suggest. How noble would be our art of every kind if only expression were as swift and infinite as imagination in its flight! But it has only poor Icarian wings of wax that bear it no farther than a stone's throw above the earth.

Material confines the flight of fancy within earthly bounds. Not till it has become as aerial as spirit, not till it has language as flexible and as little finite as the soul, shall poet cease to build upon poet's work. He who borrows now in the realm of imagination does no wrong provided he transforms his borrowing into something nobler; for the source is itself derived. It is only a question of going

further back. And if the borrower has not given his material its perfect form, he will have it borrowed from him again.

Plagiarism, then, is but a question of form. Has the idea or the material borrowed been taken in its entirety and left with all its faults upon it? Or has it been purged of its grossness and moulded into that which all men may admire? "Property is stealth" in the realm of imagination. No man has the unalienable heritage of an idea or of imaginative material. It is his who ennobles it; but he must hand it on to the man who can ennoble it still more.

There is no finer instance of this law of literature than Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Here a book is melted down and run into a new form that is as statuesque as any play that ever was staged. The borrowings from North's Translation of Plutarch's Lives are sublime in their manifestness. There is no attempt to conceal the original; for paragraphs are boldly transferred and changed into scene or speech. It is true these are gathered from different lives, those of Caesar, of Antony, and of Brutus, and interchanged or interfused according to the purpose of the dramatist. But the very words are often adopted and the whole tone of the narrative appears in the play. Had Plutarch not been a republican and an opponent of empire and written with such a manly pen, undoubtedly we should have had a different version of the fate of Julius Caesar and the Roman Republic from the hand of our great poet. In no other play except Coriolanus, which is also from Plutarch, has he used his original with such reverence as to adopt almost all its features and tone. He has resorted to no other source for his material. He seems to have accepted it as entirely ready for the dramatic mould. And in history, without a doubt, the dramatist is at the mercy of the historian he reads, if the historian is popular; he must retain the traditional facts and even views of the facts. His whole genius must be spent on the scenes so that they shall be vivid and easily represented, on the characters and their relations to each other, and on the wisdom and poetry he puts into their mouths.

And closely as we feel the incidents, and the characters and even their speeches in the play follow the narratives of

Plutarch, still we recognise that there is a wealth of genius spent upon it, that Shakespeare has written his undoubted sign-manual across the page. He has made it so noble and statuesque in its art that critics almost incline to place it in this respect above his other and greater tragedies. He has caught the spirit of the staunch Roman republican and interpreted his ideals so as to ennable them. He takes the Brutus of Plutarch and, without seeming to change the spirit of the original, makes him "the noblest Roman of them all"; he chisels out of the crude and sometimes inconsistent material a statue worthy to be placed in the shrine of the ages.

To begin with, the relations of Brutus to Caesar are not altogether plain or satisfactory; if the conqueror is not his friend and adorer, then half the tragedy of the death is gone. In the narrative the would-be king is made to distrust Brutus, and to have his mind poisoned by tales against him; he fears "these pale and lean men", meaning both Brutus and Cassius. The poet rejects this feature and makes the friendship between the two of the noblest; into Cassius he gathers up the offensive touches of the picture; only to Cassius is the remark about lean men made to apply. And from some other source than Plutarch (probably Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, where the expression is quoted in Greek however) he introduces the striking phrase "et tu Brute", adding himself "then fall Caesar"; who can measure how much this deepens the tragedy? It turns the assassination as far as Brutus is concerned from a vulgar conspiracy against an ambitious tyrant into the mistake of a lofty spirit after long spiritual struggle. The sleeplessness that haunts the patriot in the original as only physical fatigue from constant exertion and trouble is raised into new significance; it is the result of the conflict within him between friendship and patriotism. The last stroke that Brutus gives the victim is vulgarised in Plutarch; here it is spiritualised and greatnessened by the tragic surprise of the loyal friend disillusioned; here the last moments of the tyrant are made immortal by his willing surrender of a life that had not an unsullied friendship, a loyal Brutus in it.

And, in spite of the old republicanism of Plutarch, he makes his patriot do much of the offensive work of the conspiracy, makes him pass about from friend to friend and try to lead them into the bonds of secret rebellion. The poet sees the sullying effect of such a task and saves his hero from it. Brutus in the play before the assassination is wholly occupied with the inner struggle, which seems to him "like a phantasma or a hideous dream". It is Cassius that does all the dark underground work, it is he who, long before Brutus has heard or thought of rebellion, has drawn together a trusty band of discontented spirits ; and they feel they cannot do without the name and influence of the noble republican. They have to incite him by letters thrown by seeming accident in his way ; and it is only after the subtle and persuasive arguments of Cassius and an agonising night's conflict with his own spirit that the struggle at last comes to an issue and he decides against friendship and for his country. And this illuminates his attitude in opposing the death of Antony ; he will have no "villainy" in such an enterprise. But had he been tainted with the dark ways that conspiracy breeds, he would not have taken such a stand. With the unsullied spirit the poet gives him, he is the puritan of the movement ; he will do nothing that is incongruous with the upright soul. It is only his name and not his tongue attracts strength to the cause.

He thinks he will have peace now that he has decided. But his thoughts only grow darker, and, to save them from being plunged into the abyss of hypocrisy and black pollution which conspiracy engenders, the poet crowds the interval of many days between his decision and the deed into a few hours. Thus is the noble conspirator able to hide his equivocal position from himself and retain his purity unstained. And after the deed is done the poet compresses the action of months into a few days ; the two battles of Philippi, for example, with their fortnight between them, he amalgamates and abridges into an hour. By this means he makes the patriotism a wild passion that obscures and prevents spiritual degeneracy, besides producing the vigour and brevity of conclusion that a tragedy needs. The details of these breathless scenes are scattered over Plutarch's three lives of Brutus, Cæsar, and Antony, and seem

to move with slowness and deliberation. In the narrative the appearances of Cæsar's ghost are excrescences unaccounted for. In the play we seem to see the naturalness of this supernatural element. Brutus is worked up to a pitch of frenzy by the haunting look of the dying Cæsar and the futility of the death; sleepless and wearied out by long sleeplessness and struggle in the spirit, he sits down at midnight after the crushing news of Portia's death and the exhausting quarrel and reconciliation with Cassius. He feels his fate is pursuing him and yet he bears up; he tries to keep the full strength of his intellect and self-control. The result is the weakness and tyranny of the senses; they mould into a seemingly material form the thought that harasses his mind.

One of the finest marks of the poet's conscious art in emphasising this self-control of his hero, this living within his own thought, is the attitude on the receipt of the news of the death of Portia. He saw in Plutarch that "a letter of Brutus was found written to his friends complaining of their negligence that, his wife being sick, they would not help her, but suffered her to kill herself". He left this complaint out and made him suffer in silence and even check the sorrow and sympathy of his friends. Such power over himself and such still endurance of the greatest loss that could befall him throw into strong relief the intensity of his suffering from the thought of the dead Cæsar, which could wring from him those bitter cries as fate presses on him, "O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet" and "Cæsar now be still". The man who could go through the harrowing quarrel with his brother Cassius, without a single word of all the grief he had to bear and then, when weeping they stood reconciled, simply say "Portia is dead" is meant by the poet to be a hero of stoical self-control, to possess such power of will and such clear dividing intellect that no hallucination would ever touch his mind. And amid all the signs and wonders and superstitions that weigh upon the minds of the conspirators and even upon Cæsar, he stands unmoved and comes to his decision on natural grounds, on reasons of virtue. It comes with all the more force upon us at the last that he and he alone should see the apparition of the dead Cæsar. His woe-worn spirit haunted by the last upbraiding look and the threatening failure of his outrage

upon friendship and purity of means sinks beneath the torture into a weakness that is almost like a state of dream and that seems to see his brooding embodied.

In like manner the poet rejects all the recorded weaknesses of Portia. Plutarch tells us how from the pain of her self-inflicted wound she took a vehement fever. And again, when she awaited the culmination of the conspiracy, she "suddenly swounded", after sending messenger after messenger to her husband; and one came post-haste to him telling him "his wife was a-dying". In the play we hear nothing of the former sickness and little or none of this latter; it is only her excitement exhausts her and makes her feel faint; nor does she pester Brutus with messengers. But the change in the representation of her death is most marked. In Plutarch the reason given is that she was sick and "chose to die rather than to languish in pain". In the play it is not the idea of her weakness, but the sense of her greatness of spirit and love for Brutus that is heightened by her death. Surely she was not worthy of such a father as Cato and such a husband as Brutus, if it was only physical pain and weakness that drove her to self-slaughter. With the poet it is impatience of her husband's absence and grief that his enemies had made themselves so strong that master her soul; it is from this spiritual anguish she "falls distract and swallows fire". The dramatist has raised a weak-souled, weak-bodied woman into a heroine, a worthy mate for his Brutus.

The same purpose of heightening the sublimity of the spirit of Brutus appears in the poet's treatment of his relations to Cassius. The character of the hero ever overrules the keen judgment of his fellow-conspirator; but in Plutarch this is largely by his active participation in the plot and his personal persuasion; he goes about to sound his friends and followers and sullies his lofty spirit by the use of paltry canvassing. The poet has lifted him far out of such a sphere and gives him only the sublimer work of rebellion to do. And hence when he comes to the great quarrel he changes the order of Plutarch's incidents. In that historian's narrative the two have their complaints and hot strife and weeping reconciliation over before the fierce condemnation of bribery and rapine by Brutus. In the play

the first word of Cassius is

"That you have wronged me doth appear in this ;  
You have condemned and noted Lucius Pella  
For taking bribes"

and his letters in favour of the condemned man were slighted. Then Brutus has his recrimination ; he refused

"to wring

From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash  
By any indirection",

and complains that Cassius did deny him money to pay his soldiers. Now in Plutarch Cassius, in spite of the earnest dissuasions of his friends, gives "a third part of all he had", whilst Brutus speaks of having spent "all that he could rap and rend of his side" on his ships. The poet puts consistency and reason into the incidents of the quarrel by their transposition ; he gives full effect to the one and motive for the other ; and he adds a new force to the character of Brutus, making the outbreak of indignation depend not on personal inconvenience, but on the injured probity of his spirit. But he retains a feature of the dispute that an inferior writer would have rejected. It is Brutus that with his stoical sense of right and his puritan sternness is the last to give way, and is ever thrusting the goads home ; Cassius, though he feels most wronged, brings the flexibility of the man of the world to bear and first takes the generous rôle ; he is the impetuous man who has been schooled in life to tolerance. Brutus is intolerant in his uprightness, and thus the sublimity and consistency of the character are maintained.

A like effect is produced by the rejection of the humorous element from the scene. In Plutarch a mock philosopher and cynic called Phaonius pushed his way into the chamber where they were quarrelling and "with a certain scoffing and mocking gesture which he counterfeited of purpose, he rehearsed the verses which old Nestor said in Homer". Cassius laughed and Brutus expelled the intruder and called him dog. He again thrust himself in at their supper-table that same night and made jests so that they were merry all supper-time. Shakespeare turning this cynic jester into a poet lets him earnestly chide them and, after giving Brutus opportunity to utter like Hotspur his contempt of poetry

"What should the wars do with these jigging fools",

makes Cassius the ejector. Had this play come earlier in his art, he would have seized upon this jester and used him as relief to the serious tone of the play ; we should have seen him changed into another Touchstone or Apemantus ; and there would have been a passing break of sunshine before the final gloom. But Shakespeare had drifted away from the sunlight of comedy and he could not yet trust himself to jest in the deep night of tragedy. Nor could he have made Brutus comport himself well with his majestic inwardness in presence of the “gamesome” elements of life. And thus the drama is one of the few of our poet’s that are not lightened by the play of humour or wit.

But the great problem of its art is still to be met ; why should he call it by the name of “Julius Cæsar” and yet make Brutus the seeming hero and protagonist ? How he lowers the dignity of the great conqueror, although Hamlet which he wrote about the same time shows his great admiration for “the mightiest Julius”, and other plays written at different periods reveal the same ! Here he seems bent upon crowding all human weaknesses into the frame that had mastered the world ; we have nothing here of the “broad-fronted Cæsar” of his usual attitude. We hear from Cassius of the tyrant’s foolhardiness in swimming across the Tiber in his youth and of his weakness and cowardice in crying for help ; of his nightly fears as he slept within his tent on his campaigns, of his deafness, his epilepsy, his vacillating superstition, his vanity, and his imprudence. The conqueror boasts in the loudest and most bombastic terms of himself and his ability. He is the melodramatic seeker of kingship and bears himself already like an Eastern tyrant, drunken in his conceit as he apes and claims godhead. The picture is far more repulsive than that of Plutarch. We hear no echo of all his great conquests, his genius as a soldier and orator and diplomat, his modesty in writing his Commentaries, his generosity and tolerance, or his marvellous schemes for liberalising Rome and making her the centre of the united world, its arts, and sciences, and power. Only in Antony’s funeral speech are his virtues spoken of and there the eulogy has political aim. Of course there is the silhouette of Shakespeare’s Cæsar in Plutarch ; but the poet fills it in and makes it lifelike. And to surround the

problem with difficulties he does not close the play of Julius Cæsar with Cæsar's death, but prolongs it two acts more, in which Brutus is the central figure.

Undoubtedly he had a clear purpose in adopting this seeming contradiction. He had first of all to account for so great and successful a conqueror falling into so manifest a trap and meeting such an ignominious death. He had to make his audience feel sympathy with Brutus, a sympathy which was impossible with a vulgar, envious conspirator and assassin of a noble-minded and great general. He had to make it natural that this little band of rebels was able to find armies of followers and overcome so surpassing a military leader. To portray him as an oriental despot, suspicious, weak, vacillating, superstitious, almost mad with power was the easiest and surest mode of producing these effects. And as a fact we know that Cæsar did suffer a change when he began to aim at monarchy. Yet the poet ennobles his last moment by putting those upbraiding, despairing words on his dying lips at the sight of Brutus and his dagger.

So far we can understand it to be the tragedy of Cæsar. But how are we to explain the other two acts that are the tragedy of Brutus? The appearances of the dead conqueror's spirit to the great Stoic and his dying cry solve the problem. It was the spirit of Cæsar, not Cæsar, the patriot was fighting against ; "Oh that we could come by Cæsar's spirit and not dismember Cæsar." And it is the spirit of Cæsar that follows him up to the death.

"Thou art mighty yet ;  
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our sword  
In our own proper entrails".

"Cæsar's spirit ranging for revenge  
Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice  
Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war".

It was useless to fight against that which would live in emperors long after its originator lay in his own blood. Such truth forced itself home even upon Brutus before he died. Nay, he felt it before the blood was cold in the wound he had dealt his friend. For, as he tried to calm the mob and bring them over to his side in the Forum, they shouted :—"Let him be Cæsar!"

“Cæsar's better parts  
Shall be crown'd in Brutus”.

The name and position he abhorred were thrust upon him through his own speech. No more terrible blow could have been given to his faith in the republic. And, before he uttered his last “Cæsar be still”, he came to feel that his mistake had been a futile crime, that he had not come by Cæsar's spirit even in dismembering Cæsar, that Cæsarism was all the mightier a power for having a martyr in its great founder. The poet vindicates his art by making us feel it is not the tragedy of Caesar but of Cæsar's spirit. And the weaker he represents Caesar, the stronger will seem Cæsarism that thus outlasted all conspiracy.

But his heart is with the antagonist of tyranny and he mourns the tragic failure—more deeply tragic that it was a failure of the spirit. He is with the man of thought who stumbles even on the threshold of the world of action. For the poet's own sphere had been within the soul. Through all his life he had been moulding creatures of air to play upon the stage of the mind ; they were most like to life, it is true, but yet they were too majestic for life ; they were fitted for a life that had been purged of all routine and petty and gross elements. His heroes and his heroines had their faults, but they were not mean and earthy faults such as make our pilgrimage through the world so commonplace and sad. Lifelike though they are and of like fibre with ourselves, they are so purified and elevated that they raise us out of the common world to watch them. And it is in this ideal sphere that Shakespeare lived for half a lifetime, creating, moulding, sympathising, feeling the agonies and ecstasies of his characters, passing through all their experiences. And how could he abandon this etherealised picture of existence and go into real life? How could he leave the company of those noble spirits whom he could shape and fashion as he would and step into the gross world of action, where a myriad hidden interests were ever clashing, where mean and petty motive actuated men and movements, where the multitude of cross currents would but bewilder his mind and paralyse his power of action? How happy is the man who can live apart in a world created by himself, with creatures whose thoughts and

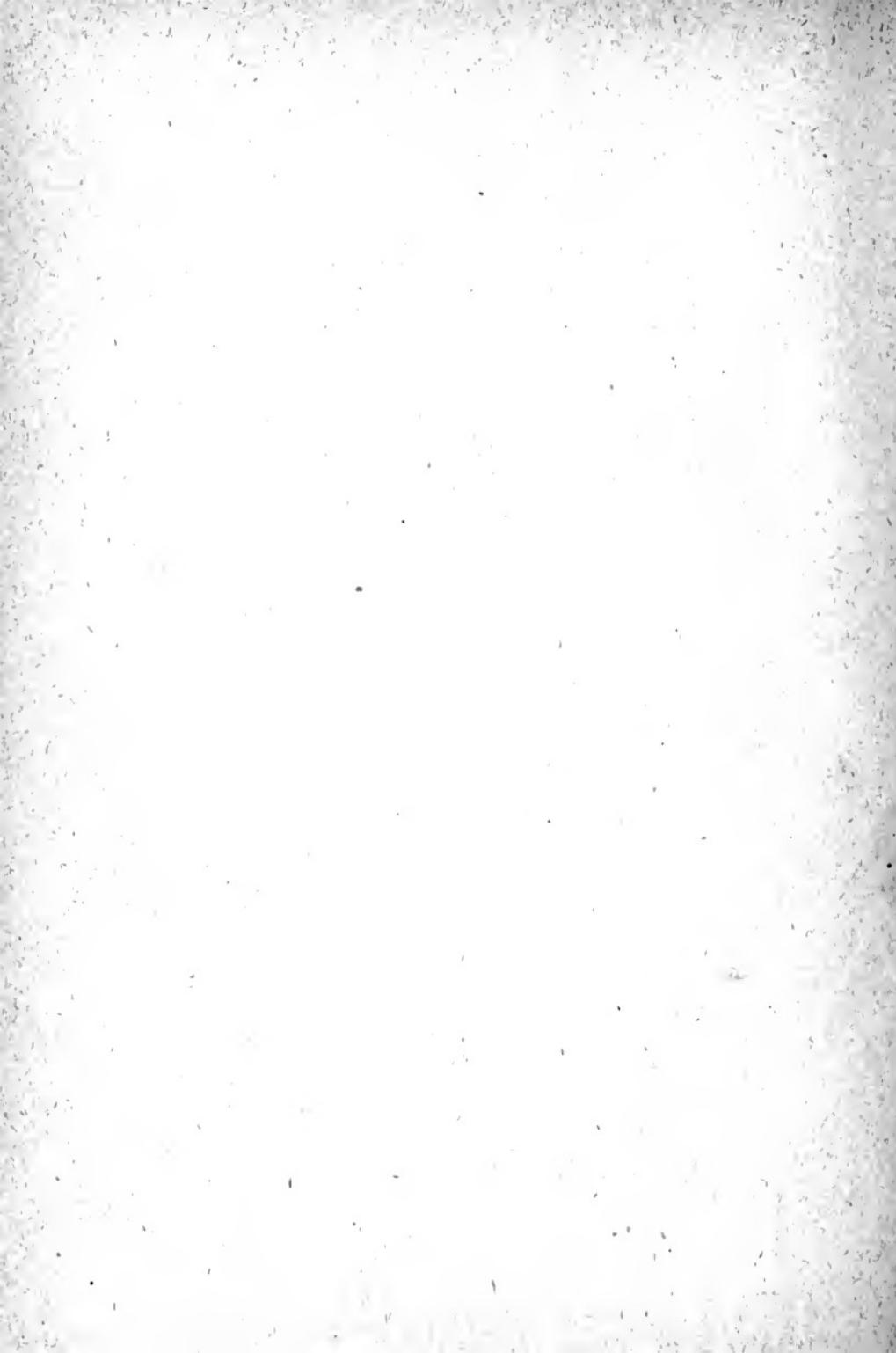
actions are his own, whose happiness and sorrow lie in his gift! We cannot wonder that he shrank from the dangers of political life, that he sat apart like an epicurean god heedless of the drift of public action. We cannot wonder that he did not toil to push himself and his work into the forefront, that he scorned to court the favour of his country. He did the duty that lay before him, he made what was needed to keep the life in, and he retired from his exciting profession when he could to work out his thoughts in the quiet of his native place.

It was when he was writing *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* that this change occurred in his existence. He would have no more to do with the blinding glare and the exhausting whirl of a public occupation. He would go back to the scenes and memories of his boyhood, back to his children, and in obscurity work out the wealth of thoughts that lay in him. None of the enmities he had made in life with his fellow-actors and fellow-writers would tear him again from his creative task. None of the common troubles that harass life like thorns in the flesh would break his solitude and introspection. And deep though the shadows were that gathered round his soul, great though the tragic thoughts that now haunted it, he had the consolation of knowing that it was not petty cares and degrading quarrels that engrossed his best energies. The echoes of the world came softened by the distance into his valley of the shadow of death. He could fight out his struggle with fate, with the sphinx riddles of life, untroubled by its gross and mean cries and slanders. He had no desire to enter into the ambitious life of war or politics. He had no desire even to press his writings on the attention of men; for that would stir the envy and the active hostility of rivals. He would use them only for the ephemeral purpose of keeping his theatre employed and for the rest he would let them drift; if they perished, well, if they floated, well.

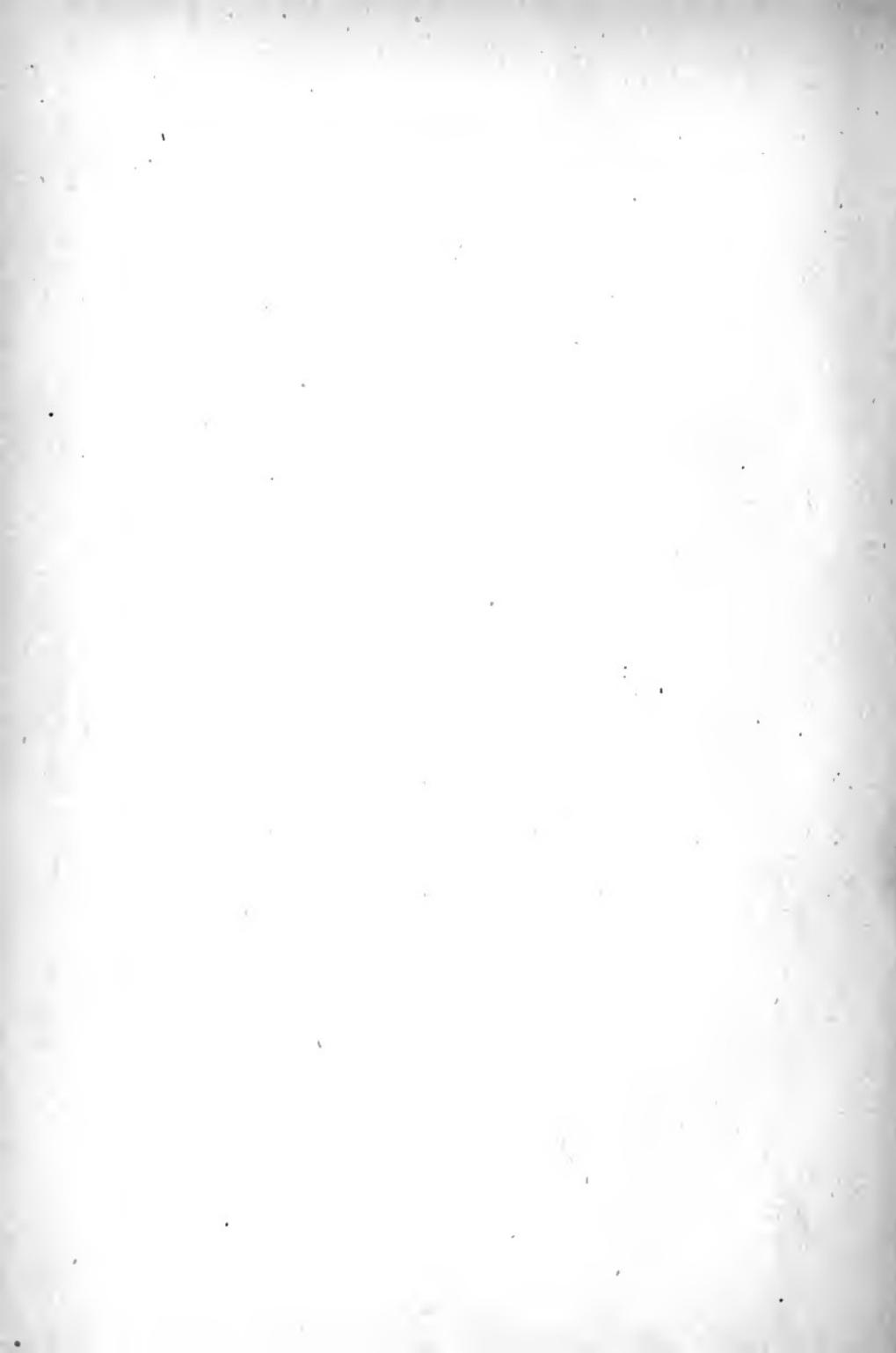
Ay, it was much to fight out his battles—the battles of the spirit—in silence amid the greening or yellowing woods of his boyhood, to have no call to profane the shrine of his doubts and his beliefs, his weariness and sorrow by speech of them with other men. He could pass the outer life of an everyday citizen, no different from his fellows, talking of

the common details of village life, whilst the vast world of his thought lay unseen by vulgar eyes, unguessed at by the men he daily laughed and spoke with. There is a stern pleasure in repression of the sorrows and dilemmas of the soul, in endurance of them without a sigh. And this he had learned when he drew his Brutus. He had seen the nobleness of bearing silently the dread thoughts that press upon the wise man's mind in this mystery-encircled life, of ceasing "to wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at", of walking with a mask of likeness to the patient rustics and marketers around him, without rudeness, without condescension to them, and hiding the scarred heart, the lofty creations, the majestic thoughts, amid which he passed his real life. He knew the stupid, unsympathetic look, the critical sneer, the dull and irritating patronage, with which the revelation of such a world within him would meet ; he had studied human nature too well to open his inner heart even to his dearest friend. Into his plays he put his self-unfoldings, his thoughts that touched the stars ; perchance some noble spirit here and there might feel their greatness ; but if not he did not grieve. His art had still an outer form that needed no deep thought and filled his playhouse ; he was still performing that which was his nearest duty in life and he was earning subsistence for his household. Now and again he heard an echo sympathetic with its inner spirit ; but it soon died out. And he kept his soul in patience wearing the mien of a well-to-do villager, bearing the reputation of a successful playwright. Is there strength so heroic among men as such a self-repression ?

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JULIUS CÆSAR.



## JULIUS CÆSAR.

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IN our modern times of science we have found a world of minute beauty and wonder beyond the range of human vision. Unaided we can see only into tissues and textures of a certain fineness. With the microscope there flash out beings and spheres that we can scarce believe exist. And we begin to feel an awe fall upon us for the wonders of the life that passes beyond the ken of our senses. We heedlessly brush along our pathway and sweep into death a myriad beings that cling perchance as wildly to their life as we. We marvel where the limit is to this involution of minute existence. It seems as if only the limits of our aids bar our way to further insight. And a sense of mystery comes into our minds that intensively the world should thus be infinite.

But it is a meagre satisfaction of our craving for the wonderful. We have so large a mixture of the petty in our own lives that we shrink from contemplation of the infinitely small. Most of our days are filled with routine so trivial and often so mean that we escape from thoughts of it with keenest pleasure. And that which is most akin to the ignoble side of our existence is repulsive if we have any trace of the divine fire within us. The petty is too much with us to desire further knowledge of it. Hence literature in fact all imaginative work evades the choice of subjects that suggest the meaner ranks and aims of existence. We shall never have an art that glories in pictures of the world just beyond and beneath the range of eyesight. For emotion demands that all the little should be excluded from our higher contemplation, as it demands the extrusion of the unlovely and repulsive. Our slavery to mechanical details grows irksome and if unbroken maddening; and, if only in our waking dreams, we would be free from them for a time.

It is the sublime that leads us out of our weary round and enlarges our nature. How the great mountains fill the

soul with peace and give us thoughts that pierce with them the azure! They do not crush our littleness with their slumberous majesty or darken our lives with their shadows. And the great sun that makes them live with colour deepening the purity of their snows and the twilight of their valleys draws out our throbbing hearts to him as he vanishes in glorious conflagration. We joy to see the ocean stretch its jewelled leagues out to the round of sky, as it dreams and ripples along the curving shore. And noblest of all, above us melts with infinite tenderness the vault of night, its eyes all tearful with the greatness of the thoughts that so silently throb through its infinitude; how slender and petty would be our emotions without this nightly majesty to ennable them! how our whole natures wing out into the unnumbered depths, forgetful of our little lives and the dim atom of star-dust we inhabit! Nay even the destructive things of nature have ecstasies for us if only they be sublime—the wrecking anger of the ocean, the wild impatience of the hurricane, the brief, resistless passion of the subterraneous fires, and the thought of worlds that sweep on through the ages to death. We stand in awe and, though we feel our littleness before them, we seem to rise above it too and claim a kinship with the mighty forces that move with such effect throughout the universe.

And in the sphere of human power it is the same. We pace with fear after the surpassing thoughts that confront the silence of infinity and yet we look up to them as if they saw the beams of godhead; they make our souls transcend their narrow fleshly bounds and feel their kinship with ethereal things. And how our spirits bow before the mighty dead whose memory is purified of earthly elements! Their masterdom has passed into history and their deeds stand out like distant mountains over a plain, their pettinesses all in shadow, their heads touching the clouds, and all the stains and blots upon their name erased by time. Even the most savage warriors if only they be great touch our imagination and make us overleap the trivial limits of our lives. Even the conquerors who have swept millions into their graves, and stood upon the necks of the survivors, impress us with a sense of infinity, if only they be resistless. Humanity would almost worship them just as it deifies the



destructive forces of the world. For there is an ecstasy of awe that raises man out of his weary round of toil. And the few transcendent characters that have appeared in history stir it as we read or think of them,—the masters who moved races or generations or the world itself to their will. Their glory once ablaze dazzles the eyes of all men and sets the imagination of even the greatest writers on fire.

It is one of those world-mastering figures that Shakespeare found in Julius Cæsar. All the sixteen centuries that had passed between had only glorified it. For there was no other human background excepting Hannibal and Alexander to detract from its elevation ; and these had faded into the twilight of myth or been overtaken by the obloquy in which their empires sank. All Europe had been moulded by the power that Cæsar founded ; all civilised idea of imperial ambition or control sprang from his name ; even the half-barbaric Teutons and Tartars by the Baltic shores took it as the title of their highest human majesty. The barbarians who had burst into the Roman world and mastered it had in their turn been mastered by the spirit of Cæsar and taken it to their hearts. Christianity that had as leaven and centre the principle of democracy turned all its history and development awry and bowed before the memory of Cæsar ; that which should have been the nurse and haven of the poor and humble put on the purple of empire and dominated mankind as a spiritual Cæsarism. Rome became a new name of awe only in that it inherited in full the trappings of the dead Cæsar. Not an empire alone was dominated by his example and spirit, but the whole civilisation and religion of Europe. And no conqueror between had ever won a tithe of his glory. Surely if there were heroic or overmastering name in history it was this of Julius Cæsar.

And we know from other plays of his that Shakespeare had drunk in the awe of all the Christian ages. From Henry the Sixth, and Richard the Third on through all his youth he spoke with reverence of the mighty name. In Hamlet, written at this very period of his life, we have repeated reference to "imperial Cæsar" "mightiest Julius". And later still we see the adoration of his warriors and heroes like Antony in the play that bears his name for

"broad-fronted Cæsar". If there was a time for ennobling the tradition and giving great expression to his awe, surely this was the supreme occasion, when he chose the life of Julius for his theme and gave the name to his tragedy. He would have had the universal sympathies of his age and audience: his Henry the Fifth and his Macbeth would have paled into insignificance before the picture, if he had only made it the ideal of all majesty. What a spectacle of greatness he might have fashioned, what an enduring type of glorious power!

Yet he chose to gather all the recorded weaknesses of the conqueror and bring them into the forefront of the picture. He has no mercy for the traditional portrait, no respect for the popular fancy, no awe before his own ideas of the past. The first word he makes his Cæsar utter lowers the sense of majesty. The great conqueror calls on his wife Calphurnia to stand in the way of Antony at the Lupercalia and "touched in this holy chase, shake off" the curse of sterility. The overmastering spirit, that had laughed before at all the superstitions that haunt the mind of man, now eagerly bows before this grossest and most palpable of them all. What even the rude rabble would scorn, he publicly respects. And then, as if to bring his weakness out, the poet makes him turn away from another superstition that had indeed a tragic reality in it; a soothsayer warns him to "beware the ides of March", and the self-confident hero looks into his eyes and waives him aside as a dreamer. A halting attitude towards superstition is weaker than sheer slavery to it, if the hesitancy follows clearer and more decisive vision.

And the noblest of the Romans begin to see the contradiction between the ambitions and the ambitious mind; they see the yearning for the divinity of kingship amid the weakest of human thoughts and emotions. Cassius presses more upon the mind of Brutus the contrast between the giant pretensions and the pigmy humanity of their former friend. He scornfully speaks of "immortal Cæsar" and tells how his immortality was nearly drowned in Tiber and cried out "Help me Cassius or I sink"; "and this man is now become a god" and "Cassius must bend his body if Cæsar carelessly but nod on him". Again in Spain he saw

"this god" that would "get the start of the majestic world" shake with fever and groan and cry for "some drink". "like a sick girl".

Cæsar re-enters with his train after great shouting from the populace ; and "the angry spot doth glow on Cæsar's brow"; he has not the greatness of self-restraint, of veiling his emotions in his majesty. And in the midst of his keen analysis of Antony and Cassius he pleads "this ear is deaf", a feature that belittles the would-be god. The conspirators remain and Casca describes with mockery the offer of the crown and the eager timidity of the tyrant ; "the tagrag people did clap and hiss him"; and he fell down in the market-place and foamed at the mouth and was speechless. But before, when the "common herd was glad he refused the crown", "he plucked me ope his doublet and offered them his throat to cut".

In the second act we have a picture of him swayed by the elements to superstition. He appears amid thunder and lightning, ill at ease at the dream-cries of his wife "Help ho ! they murther Cæsar"; and he sends a servant to the priests to bid them sacrifice and find the omens.. His wife tells him he must not stir out of his house that day ; and he weakly answers with bravado "Cæsar shall forth", "when the evils that threaten shall see the face of Cæsar, they are vanished", thus speaking of himself in the third person as if he were a god. He argues that these wonders in nature she describes "are to the world as general as to Cæsar", and supports himself with a fatalism which has a touch of his old nobleness in it.

" Cowards die many times before their deaths ;  
 The valiant never taste of death but once.  
 Of all the wonders that I yet have heard  
 It seems to me most strange that men should fear ;  
 Seeing that death, a necessary end  
 Will come when it will come".

The servant returns to say that the augurers found no heart in the beast they slew. And one relic of his noble fatalism and bravery ("The gods do this in shame of cowardice") fades back into the boastfulness that is but the cloak of rising fears ;

" Cæsar should be a beast without a heart  
 If he should stay at home to-day for fear.  
 No, Cæsar shall not. Danger knows full well  
 That Cæsar is more dangerous than he."

" And Cæsar shall go forth."

This is the reiteration and bragging that ever cover the faint heart trying to reassure itself. And we are not surprised to see the defiant mood break at once on the mildest suggestion of Calphurnia into the completest surrender.

" Mark Antony shall say I am not well ;  
 And for thy humour I will stay at home".

He tries to save his self-respect by this last pretence that it is to humour his wife.

But as if the great conqueror had not yet reached a low enough depth of timidity and brag and vacillation, another vapouring scene follows. Decius Brutus one of the conspirators enters with the resolve to use the would-be god as a mere puppet ; he had already analysed the weakness when Cassius urged that Cæsar was

" superstitious grown of late,  
 Quite from the main opinion he held once  
 Of fantasy, of dreams and ceremonies "

and that he might be kept from the Capitol by " the unaccustom'd terror of the night " ; he boldly said " I can o'ersway him " ;

" when I tell him he hates flatterers  
 He says he does : being then most flattered."

And he appears on the scene to do his fooling of the mighty one. But almost before he speaks Cæsar has dropped back into the melodramatic note of the cowardly, bragging despot, mingled with a slight echo of his old nobleness ; he is to tell the senators " that I will not come to-day ; Cannot, is false, and that I dare not, falser ", " Shall Cæsar send a lie ? " " go tell them Cæsar will not come ", and being asked for some reason to give " The cause is in my will, I will not come." Yet he tells Decius " for his private satisfaction " the dream of Calphurnia. And the conspirator plays upon his credulity by interpreting it favourably and plays upon his vanity and ambition by telling what the senate means to do and how meanly Cæsar would appear if he stayed away,

" If Cæsar hide himself, shall they not whisper—  
 ' Lo, Cæsar is afraid ? '

The once great character yields again and determines to go. The rest of the band enter and he treats them with great courtesy and hospitality.

In the third Act we find him entering the Capitol in the spirit of boastfulness and self-confidence which the decision of a weak nature assumes. He laughs at the soothsayer's prophecy now "The ides of March are come"; "Ay Cæsar, but not gone". He brushes aside another, Artemidorus, with this exultant show of what was once his generous spirit; "What touches us ourself shall be last serv'd." On his entering the senators rise. And now, on the eve of his fall, occurs the most trenchant revelation of his rash weakness that puts on the mien of strength. He wears the pretence of equality whilst he holds to the reality of despotism. He begins by asking what there is amiss "that Cæsar and his senate must redress". Metellus according to the plot arranged kneels before him to plead for the recall of his brother from exile. But Cæsar breaks in to "prevent these couchings and these lowly courtesies" and boasts that they "might fire the blood of ordinary men" but not his blood. Thus, in pressing upon them his love of democratic bearing, he claims superiority to other men; and in rejecting the cringing manners of the enslaved he assumes a manner that implies a master.

" Thy brother by decree is banished ;  
 If thou dost bend and pray and fawn for him  
 I spurn thee like a cur, out of my way."

He rises to the very climax of a despot's boast, where it claims the prerogative of omniscience. "Know, Cæsar doth not wrong". Brutus chimes in with a manly request for the repeal of the decree and startles the tyrant with the new revelation that even this his great and just friend may feel himself wronged and full of discontents. Yet, on Cassius adding his voice to the petition, he surpasses all his previous utterances in weak egotism and bravado.

" I could be well mov'd, if I were as you ;  
 But I am constant as the northern star";

—and this after the vacillation of his superstitious heart. He compares his position amongst men to that of the polar

star amongst “unnumber’d sparks” of night ; the world is “furnished well with men” ;

“ Yet in the number I do know but one  
 That unassailable holds on his rank  
 Unshak’d of motion : and that I am he  
 Let me a little show it.”

Another conspirator pleads, and he breaks in “Hence ! wilt thou lift up Olympus ?” This is the lordly arrogance of the spirit that courts a fall from destiny. The poet rightly introduces the irony of fate and makes his tyrant rise to his most overweening tyranny just before the final blow. The daggers rain upon his body and he fights against them. But when he sees the hand of Brutus raised to smite him, he surrenders his keen clutch on life. That one gesture of the friend he thought most loyal reveals the whole truth of his situation, tells him for the first time that he is the tyrant and has placed the yoke again upon the neck of Rome ; it brings back the nobler Cæsar of the great past into his heart again.

For there is the shadow of a better Cæsar hovering over this degenerate weakling of a tyrant. Does not the long struggle of Brutus with himself reveal the worth of the friend his better thoughts fight for ; “Yet I love him well”, “I know no personal cause to spurn at him”,

“ He would be crowned :  
 How that might change his nature, there’s the question.”

He is indeed unconscious of any change as yet within the character of his friend who has ever made his reason sway more than his emotions. Does not the subservience of the people and senate to Cæsar show how mighty he has been ? And how strangely afraid of him are the oldest and most powerful men of Rome, like Cassius and Casca !

“ Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
 Like a Colossus ; and we petty men  
 Walk under his huge legs and peep about  
 To find ourselves dishonourable graves ” ;

and this from his bitterest and most envious enemy. But the strange disturbances in nature, the signs and wonders, “the tempest dropping fire”, and all the prodigies and portents just before his fall tell most clearly how great he has been,

“ a man  
Most like this dreadful night  
That thunders, lightens, opens graves and roars  
As doth the lion in the Capitol ”.

Thus there looms behind the puny, epileptic, vacillating tyrant a vast and majestic figure that throws him into shadow. It is the spirit of Cæsar, with his victories and greatness, his courage and his generosity, before the yearning for kingly office corrupted it and made it petty.

And as soon as the blow is dealt and the tyrant has fallen, Cæsar the little vanishes and the old Cæsar the mighty takes his place. Antony appears on the scene and no more can the superstitious weakling remain in the mind. It is now

“ O mighty Cæsar ! dost thou lie so low ? ”  
“ O world ! thou wast the forest of this hart ;  
    And this indeed, O world, the heart of thee ” ;  
“ Thou art the ruins of the noblest man  
    That ever lived in the tide of times ” ;  
“ Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
    Shall cumber all the parts of Italy ”.

Even Brutus begins to feel the nobleness of the man again : “ As Cæsar loved me, I weep for him ; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it : as he was valiant, I honour him ”. Nay he begins to feel the invincibleness of the mighty name ; for he hears the citizens cry out to his speech “ Let him be Cæsar ”. The only fault that he finds with the dead conqueror is his ambition and this Antony ironically emphasises as the refrain of his speech : against it he sets the other virtues, faithfulness and justice, tears for the poor, love for all Rome, love that had his last thought and claimed all he had left, bravery and loyalty to his friends.

“ Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar’s angel ;  
    Judge O you gods, how dearly Cæsar lov’d him ! ”  
“ For when the noble Cæsar saw him stab ”,  
    “ —then burst his mighty heart ”.

But it needs no pleading of Antony’s to raise the world against the deed. The mighty spirit of Cæsar itself is in arms and bears down all opposition. The conspirators have to flee ; it has “ let slip the dogs of war ”, and hounds them into their very ranks. Brutus abandons his idea of the belittled Cæsar : “ Did not ” he says to Cassius, “ great Julius bleed for justice’ sake ? ” “ the foremost man of all

the world". Portia falls a victim, and one by one the assassins suffer indignities and take refuge from the mighty soul in death. In monstrous form that seems true body it haunts the midnight mind of Brutus and tells him he must die. And as he sees comrade after comrade fall he feels its growing power;

"O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet!  
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords  
In our own proper entrails";  
"Cæsar now be still."

Even Cassius, most bitter and unwilling though he was to see aught great in his foe, has with his dying breath to acknowledge the rising might of his spirit,

"Cæsar, thou art reveng'd  
Even with the sword that kill'd thee".

It is this noble spirit that is the true protagonist of the tragedy. It is this that dominates every scene, every action, every word, every character, and the weakened personality of the would-be king brings out all the more distinctly the surpassing power of that which was almost becoming a separate force in nature and history, nay feels the influence of it raising his ambitions and his tone far above the merely human. On his death the memory of the degenerate snatcher at the crown completely vanishes; and the other—the great spirit suffers apotheosis; it reaches the divinity the vacillating superstitious Cæsar aped. Cæsar, the vapouring, hesitant, shortsighted, ambition-ridden weakling, has to die "with none so poor as do him reverence" that the spirit of Cæsar may live as the never-failing fountain of imperial power. As we hear the conspirators talk, as we hear Cæsar himself boast, we seem to see a figure that deserved no better than assassination, a figure that could be nothing but weak, nothing but mischievous amongst living men, a power-intoxicated eastern despot, rushing madly on his doom. But if we read between the lines, as we look into the mist around the throne he sits on, we see a majestic figure rise before us; and nobler it grows from his dying cry "And thou too Brutus" up till the last and best conspirator lies dead upon his own sword. We see in it then not only the great warrior, the masterful Roman, the subtle diplomat, the vigorous historian, the patriotic orator, the generous friend;

the spirit has grown almost superhuman, and oppressive to the living hearts of men : it ranges "with Até by his side come hot from hell": it has a kinship with the strange divinities that influence the human destinies: it is gigantic in its lineaments and stature and weighs down thought with its dread majesty.

For the death of Cæsar is the turning point of history ; over his dead body met two worlds, the one to bid farewell to its mightiest genius, the other to welcome the legacy of his spirit. The ancient civilisation with its narrow city-thoughts was about to vanish for ever ; and in its place was coming imperialism to master Europe and put all its peoples on an equal footing. The old religions with their many deities and their absurd or rigid rituals were dead: and mankind waited for a new and nobler revelation. The former nationalities were strewn in ruins, all the pales and borders that divided them prostrate on the earth ; and a loftier nationality based on the unity of man and inspired with the democratic spirit of Christianity was struggling to be born. And all these dying or embryo worlds hovered round this "bleeding piece of earth". Not the vanishing republic alone stood over it, nor the shadowed greatness of the empire that was to be ; but all modern thought and civilisation watched the ebbing life and saw the features of itself reflected prophetically in the fast-receding soul. Not Italy alone has its heart then "in the coffin with Cæsar" or pleads through the dumb mouths of the dagger-wounds against the riot of war that will tear her limb from limb ; it is all these intervening centuries of Europe that see themselves in the torn and bleeding body. The groans of the millions wounded and dying on the battlefields of western imperialism and its ambitions and failures are heard in dim ghostlike echo down the coming ages. No rest for the nations as long as this spirit of Cæsar shall range ; every king and czar and emperor shall be haunted by it and its love of moulding worlds into one mighty whole. Even the free republics of our times still feel the shadow of Cæsarianism on them ; for Germany and Russia still reach out greedy hands to clutch their borderlands and even distant isles of the sea that lie beyond their pale, and force peaceful peoples to assume a military mien. It was the curse of the Cæsarian

myth that lay upon the mediaeval church and moulded it into hierarchic arrogance, that weighed on Austria and made her try to gather unwilling peoples into her fold, that haunted Spain with her imperial dreams across the sea and her armada, that drove the France of Louis the Fourteenth and the France of the Napoleons to deluge Europe with blood. And it lies like the shadow of a tempest athwart the future of the world. Never, till this order changes, will the nightmare of this empire-founding ambition fade from our humanity.

The poet saw its cruel power over the Europe of his time. He saw Catholic Rome stretch avaricious hands over all its minds and thrust a cæsarism of the soul upon it. He saw Spain, France, and Austria, wrangle and seize each other by the throat over the secular dream of empire, each willing to stain its hands in the blood of thousands that the blessing of the spiritual Cæsar might be upon it. And the nations of the north rose up in fury against the slavery of the soul the south would thrust upon them. He saw the peaceful peoples of the Netherlands fight to the death against the spiritual despotism of Philip. And he sang the song of exultation that his dear land raised, as he heard the tempest crashing the remains of the vainglorious Armada upon its fence of rocks. Ay even his friends within this beloved isle were haunted by the hideous dream ; men like Essex thought they only had to march forth with an army, and master a world-embracing empire. And he would teach them the awful penalty of such ambition ; he would show them how its great creator fell and dragged the world to blood and ruin with him. All happiness, all nobleness, all virtue, all that makes life worthy must vanish before these dreams of empire. Thus it was that he belittled the Cæsarian myth, by raising high the weaknesses, the poor humanity of its source and shrine. Surely the bleeding wounds, the dumb corpse, "with none so poor as do it reverence", and only the spirit of revenge for mourner, would beckon off his countrymen from such a leading and such a fate.

But he had a farther-reaching view of the vanity of aim and effort even as great as Cæsar's. He had begun to see a background far more tragic than the failure of a life. His Hamlet was now forming itself within his soul, and the

deep night of hopelessness which veils that play was already falling. He had reached already the twilight of doubt : and although he still saw the outlines of virtue, loyalty, friendship clear and substantial against the heavens, all else was fading into shadowy forms that filled his heart with tremulous fear. But human figures were receding into insignificance beneath the wondrous vault of stars. To keep some reverence for them and their efforts, he chose "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of time", the figure that had ever loomed gigantic upon the canvas of the past, the imperial Cæsar whose name still shadowed all the Christian world. But as he worked, the mighty form crumbled to dust in his fingers, its great ambitions and deeds grew petty as the commonest of common lives, its conquests and achievements were tarnished by the vice and weakness of all men.

" Imperial Cæsar turned to clay  
Will stop a hole to keep the wind away".

Baser and more puny than the poorest rustic seemed the mighty Julius as he lay there in his blood "none so poor as do him reverence", and the evil that he did alone lived after him : the good he did had been interred with his bones. What had all the millions that had perished for the shadow of power, all the blood which the spirit of Cæsar had gloated over done for the human race ? What had been bought by the groans of the dead and dying upon myriads of battle-fields or by the tears and wailing of the widowed and orphaned ? Nothing but the substantiation of a hideous phantom, nothing but a ghastly tradition of despotism, nothing but the breath of a few generations or at most a few centuries extolling or cursing the memory of a man, nothing but pompous epitaphs upon the tombs of a few kings or written in blood across the page of history.

Ah ! was it not vain to struggle thus at such a cost only to delay the stroke of death or oblivion a few years or a few hundreds of years ? It is only a difference of the number of years and not of quality between the memory of the lowly peasant who drops into a soon-forgotten grave, and the great hero who takes the tears or execrations of a race with him and stirs the wonder of posterity. Where are the heroes of the stone age, where even those of the patriarchal

times? All swept into the gulf as if they never had been? The glory of a Cæsar or Alexander grows tawdry as the centuries proceed; and there shall come a time punily brief beside the long ages that man has lived upon the earth, when their praises shall have become as silent and forgotten as the dust into which their bodies have long fallen. How petty the span of the greatest hero's life against the life of mankind! How microscopic the existence of mankind against the background of the geologic ages since the mollusc or the mastodon appeared upon this orb. And the whole existence of our world is but the life of a firefly, born and dead in a night, amid the infinities that stretch above it and around it. It seems but a puny ant-hill beneath the star-silvered night. And what are all those worlds that touch our eyes with their century-travelled rays compared to those that never swim within the ken of man! Does it not smite the pride of the greatest mind to the earth to stand for one thoughtful moment beneath this nightly spectacle of worlds, this silent humiliation of our petty orb? And yet "This majestic roof fretted with golden fire" is but "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours", this godlike humanity but the "quintessence of dust". Thoughts like to these oppressed the poet's energies in dealing with this heroic figure. And as we read his tragedies and feel them pass through our minds, we grow "aweary o' the sun"; we fall dumbly

"Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope through darkness up to God".

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# BRUTUS.



## B R U T U S .

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NO man that lives but has had his cup of sweets dashed from his lips again and again. By long and weary roads and often stained with blood we climb up to the fruit our eyes have yearned for ; and as we place it to our thirsty mouth fate kills the yearning or turns its object into dust. If there is no pleasure in the outreaching effort, then God help us ; for fruition ever lags behind desire and is its bitterest foe. Life is a series of surrenders and its path is mounded with the graves of lost aims.

Ah ! how fiercely we make for them and cling to them when they threaten to vanish ! We curse and smite at those who seem to stand in our approach to them. We cast beneath our foot even our loves and noblenesses that we may gain them. We use all instruments and trample on the feelings of our truest champions only to lay our fingers on the ends desired. And when we touch them, how inept and stale they seem, how bleached of all allurement ! We turn with loathing from the mockery of our toil and struggles ; and to stifle our grief and hide our frustration we take new toils that lead up to new aims.

But as the mournful tale repeats itself, as life adds discomfiture to discomfiture, we " 'gin to grow aweary o' the sun ". And then comes the crisis. Shall we sink back foundered and effortless ? Shall we count life "but a walking shadow" and think that "all our yesterdays have" only "lighted fools the way to dusty death"? Strong is the impulse to such a course, so dreary has life grown, so aimless its pain and struggle. Who can wonder that such myriads abandon their grasp of purpose and pass a blanched existence till death creeps on them with a natural and congruent stealth !

But in many the ever-gathering forces of life rise against such pithless conclusions. They spurn so vegetative an

existence. They will not have so passionless and tepid pleasures or even pains. And some plunge into the eddies of the world, drowning their despair in the whirl of intoxicating pleasure. They rush from action to action and taste all that the world has to give, hoping it may not be the bitter but the sweet. They try to numb the sense of pain and defeat by great draughts of passion's opiate. Else melancholy would fix itself within their lives and self-slaughter would be the only issue. They muffle the persistent refrain of all existence "To-morrow we die" and the dread song of the futility of life by "eat, drink", leave no moment without its pleasure or desire. Such is the epicurean preventive of the malady of living.

There is a nobler remedy, though still without the sense of an all-guiding hand that shapes us to some higher end we cannot see. It is to face the everlasting sense of failure that forces itself upon all lives and still cling to the ideals we revere, still speak and do the right. The noblest men we have known are those who have been taught by the fierce schoolmaster—life, to keep a wise silence and seclusion, to bear its recurrent ills without a murmur, to watch the eddying pleasures and passions of humanity unmoved, to nurse without ostent the love of virtue, though it should lead only to defeat and pain and insult, to suffer gently "the whips and scorns of time" and "the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes", and to wait the supreme moment, should it ever come, when the whole nature so fostered shall rise against some monstrous baseness and do its utmost to dethrone it. Such are the stoics of the loftier mould, steadfast, strong, and silent, filled with the larger wisdom of the universe that seeks but rare utterance. Such are they that will not truckle to fortune, or yield one jot of uprightness to find her favour. They ask no alleviation of their fate; it is enough to feel that within stands fixed the resolution never to besmirch their souls with baseness, never to have dealings with the foul element of life.

Such is Marcus Brutus as he comes upon the stage of Shakespeare's play. He has followed the stoic philosophy of the great Cato, and been confirmed in it by marrying the daughter of this representative of Roman stoicism. So deeply has he drunk in the lessons of endurance of the ills

of life, of standing by virtue and purity of soul and never yielding to the weakness despair induces, that his spirit rises against the suicide of his father-in-law and in the presence of his own immediate fate condemns the act. He has studied the philosophy to deeper purpose and borne the assaults of life with loftier scorn. He is the highest point that ever stoicism reached in Rome, the noblest interpretation it was capable of.

In the last days of the Roman republic, the flood of luxury that came in from the conquered East had swept away the final supports of Roman virtue. The old religion, on which it had depended to a large extent, had grown torpid and ridiculous; its formalities stood out in bare and commonplace outline, hard and lifeless as the ledger of a merchant. It was a round of defined duties and wearisome ritual, based on purely mercantile principles. Greek philosophy had entered and thrown a blaze of light on its harsh features and ineptitudes. And belief in it mouldered away in the minds of all the cultured at least. It was amidst its ruins that the nobler spirits still clung to the foundations of the old Roman uprightness and tried to build on them some scheme of life that would fit into the new framework of the world. And the two great schools of Greek philosophy supplied them with the rational principles --epicureanism and stoicism. Both aimed at producing the wise man who could keep his soul in peace, even though the world seemed to fall in ruins around him. Both professed to commence with the science of the day and base their whole system on its principles. But the epicurean gave the foremost place in all things to pleasure. He would have nothing, do nothing, suffer nothing that would interfere with the highest pleasure. But it must be the highest, not the coarse or morbid or physical, but that spiritual kind which is out of the reach of all vulgar pain. The stoic made reason the ruler of existence. The world is reason incarnate. And to rise above all passion, all the disturbing elements that come from the flesh is the first duty of man. The sage is he who has reached the noblest calm, who sits unmoved amid the war of life, guarding the inner shrine of his uprightness. To live in accordance with the reason that is the soul of nature, of the universe, is his

highest aim. And this was more in accord with the stern old Roman virtue that would sacrifice even family love, even the dearest son to the interests of the state.

Brutus was one of those who chose the sterner philosophy as that which embodied the best traditions of his family. But when he appears on the stage there has come a crisis in his world. How was he to keep the untroubled calm of soul to which he had moulded himself all his life and yet respect the virtue that he counted the noblest form of the rational principle? How was he to follow reason when it bade him keep his soul in patience and yet raise his hand and voice for the country that was so dear to him? How was he to love wisdom and yet wildly rise against the assassin of his country's freedom? How was he to cherish his dearest friendship, be Cæsar's angel, and yet crush the ruinous ambition this friend was forcing upon Rome? The old Roman blood boiled in his veins to see that great republic, which his ancestor had done so much to rid of tyranny in its infancy, fall in its final greatness again into the hands of tyranny. Yet how was he to stand up against the friend by whom he was so well beloved? Was not friendship the noblest gift of nature—and such a friendship too—friendship with one who was fit to be the ruler of the world?

With all the suffering that he had borne in this so strange life, was ever suffering like to this? Of all the battles of the spirit he has had to fight is not this the hardest?

“Poor Brutus with himself at war  
Forgets the shows of love to other men”

he says to Cassius in self-defence. Never has he been in life so deeply troubled, so reserved to those he loves. In spite of fortune's “whips and scorns” he has lived up to the highest ideal of his time. He has borne himself so manfully and lovingly through life that all men speak well of him and his name is sufficient guarantee that any cause is good. “I love the name of honour more than I fear death.” And now it has come to this dilemma that he must ally himself with dishonour and use death like an assassin if he would save honour. Never has he been compelled in all the discomfitures he has experienced to sully friendship—the virtue he loves most in life; and now if life is to be worth the keeping, if his spirit is to remain whole and sound

in virtue, he must stain the noblest friendship he has ever had. Nothing has he scorned so much in life as mean hypocrisy ; ever has he borne his spirit so pure in thought and intent, that he could show it fearlessly to all men's eyes ; and now he shrinks from the eye even of that noblest of wives—Portia ; he masks his troubled heart before the gaze of the world ; he bids his friends wear affability and smiles that none may see the dark purpose of their souls. He has hated all foul ends and “sits high in the people's hearts” for that he would not stain his life by paltering with what is base. And here he must go hand in hand with those who would not scruple as to means, who would dabble for vengeance in the blood of foes.

Ah ! surely he has fallen on evil times, this “noblest Roman of them all”. No wonder he has never slept “since Cassius first did whet him against Cæsar”. “O ! that he could come by Cæsar's spirit and not dismember Cæsar”. He counts the soul as something almost separable from the body, stained and corrupted by its contact. “And in the spirit of men there is no blood”. Yet it is the soul that harbours these foul thoughts that climb to power upon the necks of fellow Romans. This ambition is the very heart of Cæsar's spirit, and not friendship, not persuasion, not the noblest philosophy is strong enough to drive it forth. Oh, the horror of having once again a king trample out the lives of free Romans ! “It is the bright day that brings forth the adder”; and crowning would make Cæsar venomous. Power without pity “abuses greatness”, and Cæsar's affections have never “sway'd more than his reason”. And the conclusion comes again upon his mind with hideous force “It must be by his death”. This thing, which his whole nature with its gentleness shrinks from, he must do. His very idealism, his nobleness stands in the way of observation, and he is blind to the state of Rome and its necessities. He cannot see that its rank corruption and its vast possessions have made it to totter and that nothing will keep it as a firm state, as a force in the world, but the strong will of a single man. Only he has kept pure in the deluge of impurity and he judges the world by himself. He thinks the republic is as pure and heartwhole as it ever was ; he thinks that it is as fit to govern its now

vast territories, as it once governed its little city, that the vast treasures poured into it from the East with the enervating Eastern manners have left it as it was. And hence he is incapable of seeing into the future and knowing how inevitable empire is, how independent of the fate of any single man like Caesar ; he cannot see how poor and base the motives of his fellow-conspirators are, stirred as they are by envy, ambition, or love of revenge.

And with this noble blindness, he cannot find another path for patriotism to tread but through the blood of his "well beloved" friend. The horror of the deed he has to do lies on his soul "like a phantasma or a hideous dream", until it can be done. The contemplation of it, as with Hamlet the revenge of his father's death, weighs him down with melancholy and he broods night and day upon it. But, unlike Hamlet, the brooding leads to no hesitancy. He is not the passive idealist who sees so well the many sides to an action or a piece of conduct, that he fails to decide concerning it. He is the idealist of decision, of prompt action. He will not be driven to deeds by fate; he will go out to meet it. He knows too well "there is a tide in the affairs of men" that, if not taken at flood, ebbs away from their intents and leaves them stranded and useless. As yet in life his vision of men's deeds and conduct has only been the ethical, and the idealist in the sphere of morals is ever in the right ; for he follows the noblest instincts.

*Notes*  
But he has not trained his judgment in the world of practice, of choice between causes that seem alike good or bad or ethically neutral, but are not alike prudent or worldly wise. Brutus ever kept his eye fixed upon his own thoughts and their picture of what was great or good, and his observation of human conduct and character failed him. See how the "gamesomeness" of Antony makes this Roman puritan misjudge his powers. He thinks this follower of Cæsar is slight and trivial, without constancy, without loyalty, without strength of character to succeed. And when the other conspirators, with their keen worldly vision, see that Antony must die along with his leader, if the movement is to be successful, he brushes the suggestion aside as unworthy of a thought. They are "not butchers" but "sacrificers"; they must "kill boldly but not wrathfully". Nor has he once

thought that Octavius, the boyish nephew of Cæsar, has any danger in him. After the death again he slighted the power of Antony and in spite of the indignation of Cassius permits him to address the people over the eloquent wounds of the dead conqueror's body, thinking his own speech will neutralise the effect. But, as usual, he is mistaken and he has to flee from the city with the rest of the conspirators before the wrath of the people and the approach of Octavius. And in the last act of the drama of patriotism, he waves aside the keener judgment of Cassius once more and decides to move forward from Sardis and meet the enemy at Philippi. He never learns to distrust his judgment ; for it was ever right when he exercised it ethically upon the characters and conduct of men.

The good man, because of his very goodness, is apt to be doctrinaire and intolerant of others' opinions. He loses his way in the thickets and marshes of the world. And unless he has instruments and followers of the same virtue as himself he will misgovern his province in life. It is not the best man who is the best manager or governor or master. In this polluted world knowledge of corruption and indifference to it seem essential elements of worldly wisdom, and worldly wisdom is an essential of all great mastery of action. The good tend to be pedantically good, to count their own standard the only standard, losing for ever the give-and-take of life ; and hence we see them often harassed by wildness and rebellion in their families ; they press their own rule of life too rigidly upon their children till the bow breaks and obedience ceases. By the close of the play we grow impatient of the prudish infallibility of Brutus ; for we have seen how dogmatic he is in his decisions and how invariably he has been mistaken and committed a fatal blunder. As he falls we feel that virtue and high principle by itself is quite unfit to guide the larger issues of public action ; they are too labyrinthine and crooked to suit honest purpose and clear intent, as far at least as public life is as yet constituted.

The truly noble man should have no part or lot in spheres that need recurrent action or the management of varied characters. He can serve his kind best in being recluse and moulding them by solitary thought and the

example of his life. When, by such influences, the world has grown more gentle and less corrupt, then the philosopher may sit on thrones and virtue hold the rod of power.

In Hamlet Shakespeare showed how futile the thinker is when thrown into a sphere of action. In Brutus he reveals how great the influence of spotless probity may be before it enters into action, how vain it is amid the intricate cares of office and leadership. Apart from power, kept out of action "his countenance like richest alchymy" changes "offence" to "virtue and worthiness". How gentle and considerate he is to his servants! He will not break the slumbers of his page Lucius, even in the midst of his "hideous dream" of assassination or in his sore tribulation before the great battle that is to decide his fate and Rome's. How humane he is in his relations with Portia! "Musing and sighing" "staring with ungentle looks", he will not answer her loving entreaties to have his confidence; but "with an angry wafture of his hand" "gives sign for her to leave him"; he had, to begin with, a mettlesome and moody nature, but he has brought it under control. She knows this and kneeling she tells him how she stabbed her thigh to show what she would endure for him. And in admiration of her courage he entrusts the dark secret to her. But nowhere is the depth of his tender love for her shown more than when he knows that she is dead. He has quarrelled with Cassius and they have wept out a reconciliation. Then in talking over their anger he calmly says "O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs", and on being reminded of his stoic philosophy he adds "No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead". The question of his friend reveals the greatness of the loss; "How 'scaped I killing when I crossed you so?" Nor will he be induced to speak of it more.

"With meditating that she must die once  
He had the patience to endure it now".

There is no outcry here, no melodramatic appeal; the grief is too stern for paltry words, "too deep for tears". "Even so great men great losses should endure".

How different is his conduct over Caesar's body with the mark of his own dagger in it! That last upbraiding look and word of his great friend as he falls has pierced to his

very heart though he will not show the scar by word or sign. He becomes voluble in explanation and defence, he overflows in eloquence and action to stifle the rising pain of remorse. He is satisfied he did right and yet that look. Hence the unreal ring that Shakespeare gives to his obituary eloquence, compared with the manly heartbroken eloquence of Antony. It sounds like a lesson that has been conned. There is no genuine belief in it; he is only trying to persuade himself to believe, as he is trying to persuade the people. Thenceforth there comes upon him the fatalism of despair, whose voice he cannot stifle

“ That we shall die we know ; 'tis but the time  
And drawing days out that men stand upon.”

It reminds us of Hamlet's when he is driven to action.

And when he is not giving expression to this feeling that death is coming, the sooner the better, there is a falsetto note in his utterances. What painful melodrama is his command to bathe their hands in Cæsar's blood “ up to the elbows and besmear their swords ” and wave them o'er their heads ! How monotonous is his appeal to the citizens ! And at last he and Cassius “ ride like madmen through the gates of Rome ”. Like true conspirators they come to quarrel, almost to blows, in camp before Sardis. Brutus is ethically in the right, practically in the wrong. Against the will of Cassius he has punished an instrument because his hands were foul with bribery, and he demands money from Cassius to pay his soldiers because he would rather coin his heart's blood than “ wring from the hard hands of peasants their vile trash ”. The man who could not do this was not fit to be the general of conspirators. He was too upright.

But in spite of his clinging to uprightness, there haunts him the sense that he has sullied it. That last look of Cæsar follows him wherever he goes ; and to that outraged friendship seems to come defeat after defeat, sorrow after sorrow in revenge of it, and, when the “ deep of night has crept upon their talk ” and he sits alone and sleepless, that haunting vision fixes itself so vividly upon his mind that it seems to strike his eyeballs as the ghost of the dead Cæsar

“ I think it is the weakness of mine eyes  
That shapes this monstrous apparition ”.

But even to his ears it seems to speak and say "thou shalt see me at Philippi". He would speak with it more, but none but himself has seen or heard it. It is the shadow of his own spirit telling him he must pay for that outraged friendship. Sadness settles down upon his soul and the consciousness that he must die and all the "dreadful thing has been accomplished in vain." Before and through the final battle, though he fights against it, he feels it is his last of life.

" And whether we shall meet again I know not,  
Therefore our everlasting farewell take.  
For ever and for ever farewell Cassius ".

But yet his mind is all uncertain again ;

" O that a man might know  
The end of this day's business ere it come ;  
But it sufficeth that the day will end  
And then the end is known ".

With relentless courage he tries to meet his fate; and he finds he is victorious over the army of Octavius. But Antony defeats the other section of his army. And Cassius, thinking all lost, runs upon his sword and dies, and Titinius follows his example. These two he finds dead on their weapons, and closer home upon his soul comes the injured look of the dying Cæsar ;

" O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet ;  
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords  
In our own proper entrails ".

" The last of all the Romans, fare thee well ".

" Friends, I owe more tears  
To this dead man than you shall see me pay ".

Here again is the note of real passion, of grief " too deep for tears ".

Back into the battle he rushes to find death ; but it will not come. To his old school companion Volunnius he tells how twice the ghost of Cæsar has appeared to him by night, and " I know my hour is come ". The enemy has " beat him to the pit " ;

" It is more worthy to leap in ourselves  
Than tarry till they push us ".

There he has surrendered the last and highest tenet of his stoicism, which he had but now enunciated ;

" I do find it cowardly and vile,  
For fear of what might fall, so to prevent  
The time of life ".

Yet here he is beseeching his friend to help him to suicide. His mind goes back to the days of boyhood and its exhilaration of life ;

" Thou knowst that we two went to school together ;  
Even for that, our love of old, I prithee  
Hold thou my sword hilts whilst I run on it ".

Volumnius refuses. He bids them all farewell ;

" For Brutus' tongue  
Hath almost ended his life's history ;  
Night hangs upon mine eyes ; my bones would rest  
That have but labour'd to attain this hour ".

The alarms of the enemy chase them all from him but his slave Strato, whom he makes hold the sword bidding him farewell. And before he dies we still feel that it is that injured friendship pursues him to the death ;

" Cæsar now be still ;  
I killed not thee with half so good a will ".

And in his death he has to fly from an ignoble doom by outraging his philosophy again. All his ideals descend with him into the grave, and Rome goes too, the Rome of the great and pure past. And even his foes break into eulogy over his dead body ;

" His life was gentle ; and the elements  
So mix'd in him that nature might stand up  
And say to all the world ' This was a man ' ".

On earth is there deeper tragedy than this, to have to stain a life's ideal in order to save it ? And yet more deeply tragic still is it to go down to death without the stain removed. What is the wildest conflict of passions that bears down to tragic death compared to this ? What the hardest blow that fortune ever dealt ? What the loss or even the treachery of friends ? There is no consolation but sounds hollow beside it, there is no balm to heal the wound. And only the noblest can feel the agony of it in all its force. Disasters of the soul are none to those who are too coarse to feel them. They have no ideals to be wrecked, nay, scarcely a soul to be saved, and all their treasures are of the flesh, corruptible, the quarry of every " ill that flesh is heir to ".

To the lofty spirits that

“ Fortune’s buffets and rewards  
Have ta’en with equal thanks ”,

that lead a life scarce trammelled by the body, all that happens is unessential unless it stains their purity of aim. That for which all else has been as naught, if broken, life has lost its worth. It is not the fall of his beloved republic that presses upon the heart of Brutus, though that is bitter thought enough. It is not the dark outlook of tyrants placing their feet upon the neck of free Romans, though all his life long that has been the impossible Hades of his dear land. It is not the self-immolation of his noble Portia, though that has left a wound that would never heal. These would have harrowed his soul and been perpetual fountains of sorrow to him. Yet he could have borne them and still lived, still stood by his noblest stoic tenet, that it is “cowardly and vile” “to prevent the time of life”. Into the silenter chambers of his spirit he might have withdrawn and communed with the memory of his past. To such a mind as his, no outer losses, even though they be of friends, are hopeless. They would never drive him to despair and death. He has still the thought of his uprightness to stand by him.

Why should he plead so piteously with his companions and at last with his slave to hold his sword that he may “prevent the time of life”? It is not the fear that “he go bound to Rome”. Brutus “bears too great a mind” to harbour such a fear. It is not that the battle is lost and all his cause with it. For he says “I shall have glory by this losing day”. It is not that his friends have ever turned traitor to him. One of his last words is

“ My heart doth joy that yet in all my life  
I found no man but he was true to me ”.

Who else in all the world could take such consolation to his soul? Who amongst leaders of a cause? Who most of all amongst upholders of the good and right? Not even he

“ Whose feet were nail’d  
For our advantage on the bitter cross ”

could live his life upon this earth without a traitor amongst his followers, without his dearest friends deserting him.

See the deep wound that treachery had made within the soul of the dying Arthur, the ideal of all knighthood and honour; his "fellowship of famous knights" "unsoldered"; his loved wife, his noblest friends, even the last follower of the defeated king, untrue to him, who had set truth and loyalty above all treasures of existence.

And here we have a man who can in dying say "I found no man but he was true to me". Friend and foe alike were loyal and said no wrong of him. Ah! where in all the course of time shall we find fortune like to his? And yet he almost kneels before his slave and pleads for death. Some deeper wound, some more tragic disaster drives him on to leave so fortunate a life. None but the sullyng of his ideal could explain self-slaughter in a man of such surpassing nobleness of thought. It is the dying look of Cæsar haunts him. Never has friend deceived him, or distrusted him. Never has "this foremost man of all this world" had question of his loyalty to him and friendship. It was his last pathetic "And thou too, Brutus" that had flashed the light upon the broken loyalty, the sullied uprightness, the surrender of his purest ideal. It was this pursued him from defeat to defeat, never giving him one moment's rest from the assassination till the sword ran through his body. It was this that persecuted his senses with hallucination. It was this that made him take his "everlasting farewell" of Cassius, this that made him seek death amid the ranks of battle and at last at the hands of his slave. Nothing but death would give this gnawing pain surcease. And the last words on his lips are "Cæsar, now be still".



ANTONY.



## ANTONY.

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TO define tragedy seems easy and yet when attempted is the most difficult of tasks. At first it appears as if it were nothing but a story that ends in death, a plot that has bloodshed in it. Every tragedy we know of has death as its atmosphere. But dying is as common on this earth as life ; we scarcely notice that the world is a great graveyard and that every moment of its history is stained by the finger of dissolution. The commonplace does not enter into tragedy ; we feel it is exceptional and striking. And we add to the death that is implied in it the idea of violence. All tragic deaths are violent collisions of unbending wills that seek the final issue, clashings of purposes that stop not short of ultimate conclusions. Yet oftentimes duels and battles have carried no tinge of tragedy in them, leaving perhaps on the minds of spectators only the sense of loathing or horror, not the deep feeling of the universal struggle that underlies all existence. And we have only to think of the coarse gloating over the murder column of newspapers if we would see how far from tragic death may be even when joined with violence.

Violence and death then are only the accompaniments of tragedy and not the essence of it. There lies a deeper secret in it. In ancient times it was the clash of two destinies, national or family or personal. In Prometheus Bound it is the will of the gods and the fate of men that conflict ; the great protagonist of our race has for the good of his fellows done a wrong to Zeus the king of the gods and he is chained to Caucasus for his sin and bears the never-ending agony of a vulture gnawing at his vitals. Thus the world unseen and the world of men encounter and the result is tragedy even without the intervention of death. And this is ever the noblest kind of tragedy amongst the Greeks, wherein sin against the gods seeks expiation in the life of the individual or the family or the race. Some divine

law is broken, wittingly or not, and vengeance oftentimes with slow foot and silent gait dogs the victim to his doom ; he passes on all unconscious through life ; but the spectators know the horror that awaits him. And even where natural affection, as in the *Antigone*, comes into play, there is still a background of divine wrath to give gloom to the death of the faithful sister ; it is the curse of her family coming from the unexpiated sin of the past that hurries her on to her doom.

We seem to pass into a different world, when we see or read our modern tragedies. For here the vengeance of heaven has disappeared ; the deity never intervenes ; there is no silent, viewless wrath pursuing the victim to the death ; there is no curse lowering over a race or a family. The atmosphere has become wholly human, unless here and there for some poor concession to popular superstition in the appearance of a witch or some perturbed spirit. It might seem as if modern tragedy were wholly given over to the vulgar elements of violence and bloodshed. And undoubtedly this is its tendency ; it inclines to "sup full with horrors", to deluge the stage with blood at least at the close.

But that is only vulgar modern tragedy, tragedy that has not found its footing in the tide of human affairs. We have true substitutes for the old divine elements ; for the will of the gods we see in all our noblest tragedies the working of the laws of nature that never leave violation of them unrevenged. For the curse that lay upon a race or family we have heredity that stirs our pity for the victims that so innocently suffer by it. For sin or outrage on the laws of heaven, we have crime and the scorn of those undying laws that nature and the wisdom of the ages have evolved within the breast of man. For the clash of destinies, of the will of Zeus and the fate of man, we have the hero dashing himself against the prison bars of life, trying to solve its sad insoluble problems. It is not his death or the death of the victims of his fate that forms the tragedy, but the long agony that will not pass except into the grave ; death is but the natural and fit crown of all the pain and woe. In all this we have left behind the theological idea and come into a purely human world. It is, in short, character that is now

the soil of tragedy, the nature of man himself and not the laws that unseen unknown deities compel him to accept, whether he understands them or not. It is now his own nature with its foreign and its self-originated elements he has to struggle with and shape to nobler ends; and the tragedy lies in the noble failure. It is now in character that destiny lies, character moulded by ancestral deeds and by our own. It is the first word and the last of modern tragedy.

And no dramatist has been more conscious of this than Shakespeare. But it was a gradual light that dawned upon him, not an instinct born within. For in his earliest attempts he "supped full with horrors" and seemed to have no eye for character. A long period of history and comedy prepared him for his later tragedy. For youth is apt with its shallow experience of the world and human nature to see tragic effect only in sanguinary incidents. When he came to write Julius Cæsar he knew that character was the all-in-all of tragedy, and yet he did not see how independent it might be even of death. He has to stain the soul of his noblest figure Brutus with blood, the blood of his friend, before he can divide it against itself and rack it with the agony that can find no rest but in the grave. Nay he has not yet come to trust his genius for tragedy that has purely natural causes; he has in this play and Hamlet and Macbeth to drive the tragic remorse home by supernatural appearances; the ghost of Cæsar, of Hamlet's father, and of Banquo are brought in to dramatise the remorse and curse that have come from the outraged law of the spirit. Not till he writes Othello and Lear does he realise how nobly tragic the natural working of mere passion may be made, how terrible the agony that may rack the human breast. Not till these had shown him his power did he feel that he could dramatise such tempests in the soul without embodying them in some impalpable but outward form.

When he wrote Julius Cæsar, then, he was not trained enough or bold enough in tragedy to place the problem of Antony's nature upon the stage. He was deeply interested in it, we can see; but it had no tradition of supernatural influence in the story, nor could he see any opportunity for introducing it. He postponed its full development then for seven or eight years till he was sure of himself in purely natural tragedy.

The problem he saw before him in Antony was this ; how shall a strong but luxurious and pleasure-loving nature meet the demands of imperial duties thrust on it and resist the temptations imperial power is sure to place in its way ? How shall the mere aesthetic sense of virtue bear the strain of a large-sphered life ? How shall a character, built not upon principle, but upon a feeling of the beautiful and noble carry the care of an empire ? It had been a strong temptation of the Renaissance not only in Italy but in England to elevate beauty spiritual and physical above virtue, the fitness of life above its goodness. Such a new world of beauty had burst upon the gaze of the Italian poets and painters and sculptors that it seemed to be enough for all life. Morality and religion were but phases of beauty and took all their essence from it ; and goodness and worship were in danger of losing hold on human nature in its search for the beautiful. There was fear of a similar result in England from the new birth of learning, in spite of the stern self-repression the long winters induced in English natures. The Reformation saved the Teutonic North from the submergence of reverence and virtue in aestheticism. Again the danger approached, and the young dramatists, like Marlowe and Greene, adopted the Italianate worship of beauty as the all-in-all of life. Their fate, their ignominious deaths and the energy and patriotism demanded by the Armada postponed it again. But in the early years of the seventeenth century peace gave opportunity for luxury, and in the court of James once more Italianism triumphed ; principle and religion became but auxiliaries of aesthetics. The cavalier party was already developing its characteristics under the guidance of James and his courtiers, and all the more that puritanism was defining itself and drawing apart from the pursuit of pleasure and beauty. The dangers that lay before such an attitude to life and its problems and duties pressed strongly home upon the poet's mind, and hence it was that in 1608 he resumed the study of Antony's character in the play that bears his name.

But in Julius Cæsar already are hints given of the problem that lay in the character. His first appearance reveals his love of excitement of the blood ; for he is about to run the course of the Lupercalia, and is asked by Cæsar to touch

Calphurnia with the thongs. And he displays complete subservience to the hero. "When Cæsar says 'Do this' it is performed". He is a man of age and experience in war and yet he is willing to enter into these youthful frolics, to be "gamesome", as Brutus put it, and to worship a more successful man with the enthusiasm of youth. Ambition has no place in his mind compared with pleasure and worship of what takes a lofty or beautiful place in life. Cæsar knows him like a book, and compares him with the lean Cassius, who "loves no play as thou dost Antony"; this during the last years of Elizabeth's reign was the best way of describing a strong stern puritan nature, frowning upon the stage and its frivolities and vices.

"Such men be never at heart's ease  
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves".

But men like Antony, lovers of plays, of beauty and pleasure, are glad to take a second place; for thus are they free from responsibility and care and yet have all the joys of great power and display. He is willing to fetch and carry for Cæsar, to serve all his ambitions, provided his enjoyment of life is not disturbed; to prevent annoyance he stands up for Cassius;

"Fear him not, Cæsar, he's not dangerous;  
He is a noble Roman and well given."

But Cassius does not return the compliment; in the conspiracy scene he insists on Antony's death;

"We shall find of him  
A shrewd contriver."

Brutus thinks lightly of him as "but a limb of Cæsar" and gets the idea rejected. Thus the man of aesthetic pleasures and the man of stern virtue both underrate their opponents; the one has not fathomed the seriousness of life or known the force its evil is capable of taking; the other has not fathomed the guile and worldliness of life or seen the havoc it can work when it becomes serious. Antony thinks Cassius a noble Roman and thus shows a noble vein in himself: without envy himself he cannot understand how strong envy may be in others. Brutus knows Antony is "given to sports, to wildness and much company" and thinks as the Puritans did that such bohemian lives are incapable

of strong or great action ; the cavalier and the puritan in all ages fail to realise each other's virtues.

The source of Antony's strength is that for which he was perhaps most despised—his capacity for discipleship, of subservience before a great spirit. It is the only thing that can save such merely aesthetic, pleasure-loving, bohemian natures from complete collapse in life—their devotion to a greater, more self-controlling nature. As long as Cæsar's spirit dominated him, he was capable of continuous exertion and ambition. Otherwise his energy would have appeared only in fitful bursts that would grow rarer and rarer as pleasure gained the mastery. In the later play Octavius speaks of his marvellous endurance in former days before Modena ;

“at thy heel

Did famine follow ; whom thou foughtst against,  
Though daintily brought up, with patience more  
Than savages could suffer ” ; “on the Alps  
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,  
Which some did die to look on ; and all this  
Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek  
So much as lank'd not.”

He was, in fact, ruled by his imagination ; it could fire him to the noblest deeds and even to stoical endurance that seems quite inconsistent with his epicurean nature. It was his imagination made him worship the hero Cæsar and, setting aside the republican traditions of Rome and his family, offer him the crown. It was this made him bow at first before the purity and boldness of Brutus, when his master lay in his blood ; and it was this that wrought him up into such eloquent passion over the dead hero till the crowd changed before it from sympathy with the assassins to the wildest fury against them. He appreciates the world-famous character of the scene at once, and it satisfies his aesthetic love of nobleness to die on the same swords that had buried themselves in “mighty Cæsar's” body,

“made rich

With the most noble blood of all this world.”  
“Now whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke  
Fulfil your pleasure. Live a thousand years  
I shall not find myself so apt to die ;  
No place will please me so, no mean of death,  
As here by Cæsar and by you cut off,  
The choice and master spirits of this age.”

He shakes hands with them instead, bloody as they are. His imagination has not yet kindled at his own eloquence ; he takes a middle course and wishes to be neither coward nor flatterer. And as long as the conspirators are present he finds it difficult to feel sincere in this embarrassing dilemma, between his love of peace and his grief for Cæsar ; and there is a certain artificiality in the expression of his emotion, indulging as it does at its more fervid climax in a pun ;

“ O world ! thou wast the forest to this hart ;  
And this indeed, O world, the heart of thee.”

Cassius knows what eloquent power such fervour of emotion will have from Antony and wishes to prevent his address to the people. But Brutus fears not and in departing permits him. And we have from him the noblest, most poetic eloquence that Shakespeare ever produced, beginning with

“ Thou art the ruins of the noblest man  
That ever lived in the tide of times ”

and closing with the invocation of the curse upon Italy. The speech of Brutus in the next scene is monotonous and cold beside it. And he follows that up too with another piece of eloquence as noble and sincere.

“ Bear with me ;  
My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar  
And I must pause till it come back to me.”  
“ Kind souls, what weep you when you but behold  
Our Cæsar’s vesture wounded ? Look you here,  
Here is himself, marr’d as you see, with traitors.”  
I “ show you sweet Cæsar’s wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,  
And bid them speak for me.”

And yet at the close of this manly appeal, when the mob rushes off to attack the conspirators, he turns round on himself and says ;

“ Now let it work ! Mischief, thou art afoot,  
Take thou what course thou wilt ! ”  
“ Fortune is merry  
And in this mood will give us anything.”

This sounds machiavellian, the words of a malignant hypocrite, after all his grief. But Antony has no hypocrisy in his veins ; it is merely the mood of triumph that follows, in such an unmoral nature as his, the exhaustion of his previous emotions despair and sorrow by too free a ‘vent,

and the joyous feeling of power in wielding a new weapon—the mob. He indulges each passion as it comes uppermost. And we are not surprised that when he stands again over the dead body of a hero—Brutus, he again weeps and utters a splendid eulogy ; he has tears for the assassin as true as for the victim, provided both be noble and die like heroes. He is perpetually conscious of the theatrical situations of life and is ready for them with the appropriate emotions and utterance.

And with all his emotions he is heartless as Octavius when occasion calls. We have only to read the proscription scene in the fourth act to see that. There he has not a tear or word of sympathy for those they resolve to butcher, not even for his sister's son. And the scorn he expresses for Lepidus that " slight, unmeritable man " fit only to carry burdens like an ass reveals another hard vein in him ; he has no mercy or sympathy for the trustworthy but incapable or unheroic. This is the strange thing about unmoral, aesthetic natures, that they can weep and show emotion where they are conscious of the eyes of men and plead for mercy and tolerance where they feel they are producing an effect, and yet they show themselves, when theatrical effect is out of the question, hard and cruel and uncompromising as the most cunning politician. For Antony has, with all his epicurean aestheticism, his gamesomeness and love of play, the strong will and courage of a warrior, besides the excellent judgment of one experienced in battle. He is undoubtedly the " masker and reveller " that Cassius tells him he is ; but he is more ; he surpasses all except Julius Cæsar in capacity for war. This is the strong and noble side of his nature. He knows better than the " peevish schoolboy " Octavius the chances of the enemy and the right disposition of the forces ; and though he unwillingly gives way to the pale youth whom he contemns and takes the wing of the army that is opposed to Cassius, it is he saves the honour of their side ; Octavius is beaten by Brutus ; he plucks victory out of the novice's mistakes. And then over the dead bodies of his foes he can afford to forget their hostility and speak with his old eloquence of manly generosity.

And the poet means to emphasise this noble side of him ; for he omits from this play and the other in which he

appears the instances that Plutarch gives of his ruthless ferocity and his wild violence and injustice, whilst he passes lightly over incidents in his life that show him the licentious bacchanal. Undoubtedly he meant to portray to the courtiers of James the fate of noble natures too fond of the pleasant side of life and paying more respect to the fine things of existence than to the good things. Antony had the world at his feet and with his superior genius and experience he might have thrust aside the cold, unwarlike diplomat Octavius and seized the empire Cæsar had made. But his love of pleasure and display was too much for him. And it is in Antony and Cleopatra we see the magnificent descent into hades.

That play opens with the scene of his enslavement to the Egyptian queen that strikes the key-note of the tragedy and tells the spectator of the tragic curse that dogs the footsteps of the hero. His own soldiers speak with contempt of him as "the triple pillar of the world transform'd into a strumpet's fool." But we almost forget the degradation of the great warrior in the splendour of the atmosphere he throws around the amorous scene ;

" Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch  
    Of the ranged empire fall ! Here is my space."  
    " Now for the love of Love and her soft hours "  
    " There's not a minute of our lives should stretch  
        Without some pleasure now."

It is like a noble sunset that precedes tempest and ruin. Nor is he without sense of the shame that has befallen him. "On the sudden a Roman thought hath struck him", when he receives the news of his wife Fulvia's death ; and he resolves ;

" These strong Egyptian fetters I must break  
    Or lose myself in dotage."

And yet we who look on know that the fetters will never break till ruin and death overtake him ; and therein lies the tragedy ; these firm resolves are but as water before "this enchanting queen." Enobarbus is in the position of spectator and chorus in seeing the fate that is drifting down on him ; but he is more than chorus ; he shares in all the tragedy, yet with a humorous sense of the irony of life. He tries to bring out to Antony with sly ridicule the futility of

his resolve. And, although the repentant hero yields a little in the parting scene, he departs and we find him soon discussing with Octavius and Lepidus the affairs of the world and marrying Octavia too in order to cement the triumvirate. He has some pathos for her and her fate as he had admiration for Fulvia ; but such emotions are as nothing against the intoxication of Cleopatra's charms. With Enobarbus we know the result ; he says in the midst of the marriage rejoicings ;—“he will to his Egyptian dish again” ; “he married but his occasion here” ; and Antony has already resolved to be off when he hears from the soothsayer that though his demon, or spirit is “noble, courageous, high, unmatchable where Cæsar’s is not”, yet “near him thy angel becomes a fear as being overpowered.”

“ I will to Egypt ;  
And though I make this marriage for my peace  
I’ the east my pleasure lies.”

Yet he bids farewell to Octavia with the most chivalrous and poetic grace ;—“The April’s in her eyes”, nor can

“ Her heart inform her tongue,—the swan’s down feather  
That stands upon the swell at full of tide  
And neither way inclines”.

We soon find him at Actium the foe of Octavius and the slave of Cleopatra once more ; and the slavery drives him mad ; he thrusts aside his own warrior instincts and the lessons of experience, and at her bidding he fights his enemy by sea. In the middle of the battle she fled, and he “the noble ruin of her magic” “clapped on his sea-wing and fled after her”. But shame soon comes upon him ;

“ the land bids me tread no more upon’t.  
It is ashamed to bear me”.  
“ I am so lated in the world, that I  
Have lost my way for ever”; “ O,  
I follow’d that I blush to look upon;  
My very hairs do mutiny”.

And he generously bids his friends leave him and take his treasure with them. At first he will none of his Egyptian sorceress. “O whither hast thou led me, Egypt?” “ My heart was to thy rudder tied.” And from his despair he rises into wild courage and a revel of voluptuousness.

“ Fortune knows  
We scorn her most when most she offers blows ” ;  
“ Come,  
Let’s have one other gaudy night ”.

But between these two expressions he has grown furious against Cæsar’s messenger and had him whipped for kissing Cleopatra’s hand, and in sadness that his

“ good stars  
Have empty left their orbs and shot their fires  
Into the abyss of hell ”

been reconciled to her again. As Enobarbus sees, his reason has fallen before emotion ;

“ A diminution in our captain’s brain  
Restores his heart ”.

And this faithful humourist feels, when his master sends to challenge Cæsar to a duel, that his day is over, his wisdom is gone.

“ I will seek some way to leave him ”.

But before he goes the great hero and actor makes him and all his servants weep ; when the refusal of the challenge comes, a mood of sadness falls on him, and he expresses it in graceful generosity to his followers ;

“ you have served me well  
And kings have been your fellows ” ;  
“ Haply you shall not see me more ; or if,  
A mangled shadow ” ;  
“ Let’s to supper, come  
And drown consideration ”.

The curse of his folly and pursuit of pleasure is coming on him. The soldiers hear his patron-god Hercules depart from him in music. And he has to bear the agony of seeing the fickleness of Cleopatra and the desertion of his friends. Yet he still acts the noble and generous lover of the manly ; he sends his treasures after Enobarbus to Cæsar’s camp and bids

“ Say that I wish he never find more cause  
To change a master. O my fortunes have  
Corrupted honest men ”.

His generous action and the cold diplomacy of Cæsar agonise the old humourist and he dies rather than fight against Antony.

"O Antony,  
Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid  
My better service when my turpitude  
Thou dost so crown with gold!"

The thought breaks his heart;

"I will go seek  
Some ditch wherein to die".

And the last words on his lips are "O Antony! O Antony!"

This is a striking feature in the life of this "masker and reveller", the enthusiasm he inspires his followers with, whenever he pleases to rise above his degenerate passion and be the warrior. How nobly, how successfully he does bear himself in battle, when Cleopatra is not near! What chivalry he displays to his enemies and even to those who desert him! He has none of the wily tactics of the cold Octavius, but only personal bravery and experience. And if he could, he would like a mediæval knight bear the whole brunt of the combat and gather all the wounds of his soldiers into his own body. But there is no principle in all this, only momentary impulse roused by the greatness of the situation; and he sinks back into his effeminacy. It is not duty rules him, but the beauty and chivalry of life, the part he would play in the pageantry of existence. And when the glory of it is passed away, he has no call to live.

Nobly does he bear himself in his last battle and wins the day; but again his "serpent of old Nile" deceives him and flees with the fleet.

"All is lost;  
This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me";  
"O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more."

He suspects it is treachery to win Cæsar.

"To the young Roman boy she hath sold me."

This is the final agony, the "shirt of Nessus", the envenomed robe he wears, that though he has given her his heart, he has not faith in hers. The ignoble side of his nature then appears; he will have revenge; "the witch shall die." But even here he has no trust in his resolve; he knows he is like water before this fate of his. For this is the revenge he carries within his breast, that he sees with unmisted clearness the reality of his nature and circumstances; he knows how unstable he is, how unreliable. In his last speech, which he makes to his faithful slave Eros, he

compares himself to a cloud, that changes its shape to every breath, "and mocks our eyes with air". He has long resolved that if he were to reach such shame he would be done with living and Eros would help him out of it.

"there is left us  
Ourselves to end ourselves".

And the eunuch's announcement of Cleopatra's death only comes to confirm this resolve ;

"Unarm, Eros ; the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep."

He cannot bear his armour on ; for the throbbing of his heart is like to "crack its frail case", eager to overtake his queen ;

"Stay for me ;  
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand."

He seems to inspirit his followers to noble deeds ; for rather than touch the blood of his brave master Eros kills himself.

"Thrice nobler than myself !  
Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros, what  
I should."

and as he falls upon his sword ;

"Eros,  
Thy master dies thy scholar."

But the worst pang is to come ; the stroke does not kill him ; none of his followers will help him to his death ; and it is announced that the wily Egyptian is not dead, but has sent him a lie to see how he would bear it. He bids his guards bear him to her side and hold their tears ; they must not play the coward before fate ;

"bid that welcome  
Which comes to punish us, and we punish it  
Seeming to bear it lightly."

The nobler Antony thus floats to the surface in his last throes ; he does not say one word of the agony of the new deceit, but longs to die by her side.

"I am dying, Egypt, dying,  
Give me some wine and let me speak a little".

He sinks his jealousy of her and bids her do that which he would scorn to do ;

"One word, sweet queen ;  
Of Cæsar seek your honour with your safety".

He tells her not to "lament or sorrow at" his end, but to think of his former fortune

" Wherein he lived, the greatest prince o' the world,  
The noblest ";

he does not basely die ;

" now my spirit is going :  
I can no more ".

And it is not Cleopatra alone that feels the greatness of the spirit that is gone ; Agrippa is moved to eulogy ;

" a rarer spirit never  
Did steer humanity ; but you, gods, will give us  
Some faults to make us men ".

Even the cold Octavius is touch'd ;

" O Antony !  
I have followed thee to this " ;

" We could not stall together  
In the whole world ; but yet let me lament  
With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts  
That thou . . . my mate in empire  
. . . should divide our equalness to this."

His chivalric death is tragic in its chivalry and touches to nobleness the coldest and the most fickle of hearts. Aided by the fear of being led in triumph through the streets of Rome it inspires the life-amorous queen to die as noble a death as her hireling nature was capable of.

It is clearly the design of the poet that Antony shall be a very noble character ; and this is still clearer, when we compare his portrait with that in Plutarch. Here he is filled with the finest of generosities ; there is no character in all Shakespeare we would trust more with our lives and fortunes. Antony we feel would deal most magnanimously with them. If a vile or petty emotion comes uppermost in his mind, a moment's thought promptly thrusts it back. Even against those who wrong him he harbours no ill feeling. He is the ideal of the cavalier, impressive, world-commanding, graceful, lavish, brave to a fault, conscious of all the greatnesses of life. And yet we feel he earns his tragic fate. Fascinating though he is by his very faults, we see his nature can take no other road than to his doom. He is unconscious of the moral structure of the universe and has only generosity and

theatrical fitness to act as conscience. Within his nature lie the germs of decay in the passion for excitement and pleasure. He has no sense of the seriousness of life, but will succumb to the temptations that offer. He who has not mastered his passions is their slave ; that is the lesson written on the fate of Antony.

I have seen a child clutch at the multitudinous dance within the silken radiance of a sunbeam ; so real seemed the yellow strands, so palpable the myriad motes that wove unrestingly athwart them that nothing could persuade the little hand to cease. Again and again the fingers thrust upwards through the fairy fabric and closed on nothing. Baffled and weary at last they turned to clutch some other child's caprice. Yet not for years would this enticing phantom cease to draw the childish yearnings towards it.

And I have seen the human millions down the vista of the ages chase with maddened rush and out-stretched childish fingers the film of pleasure that for ever comes almost within their reach and for ever gleams with all the colours of the golden sunset ; close to the lips the luscious-seeming fruit bends down, yet ever passes onward with the westering sun. And it is nothing but the tear-drops on their eyelashes, pressed out by the anguish of existence, and catching the changeful radiance of the sinking orb. And ever as they move they clutch at it and think they have it in their grasp ; but ever it eludes them, by some fault of circumstance they think. Each sees the foremost in the race appear to win the glittering treasure and he struggles on, if weak perchance falling beneath the feet of the trampling crowd, if strong heedless of his neighbour's woe and crushing him down as he moans. There it seems only some steps ahead, brilliant, alluring, yet substantial. And the agony and wailing of the myriads fallen behind have no significance for him ; it is but the lot of man, past remedy, past even sorrowing for.

But a few stand out from the human torrent and watch its maddened eddies across the desert of life. They see the pathway far behind through countless ages strewn with the dying and the dead, forlorn or all forgotten. And underneath the hurrying feet of the heedless and passionate throng moan the hopeless and the wronged. And overhead hovers the

vulture death, knowing that all are his victims, even the leaders of the race, who seem to have their fill of the golden pleasure. They see the elusiveness of the pursuit, the nothingness of that which all men seek and seem ever on the point of clutching. They know it is but the shadow of the soul on fire with passion, but the sheen of sunset through the tears of agonised humanity, but the mirage of thirsting desert-stricken spirits. And their hearts bleed to see the wild passioning for a phantom, to know the hopelessness of the mutual woundings in the struggle, to feel that nothing but death will open the eyes to the shadowy nature of their aim, and the vanity of its pursuit.

But as age follows age their numbers grow that turn from the wild race and watch with sorrow its futility and anguish. And on their vision dawns the loveliness of that which they had shunned as harsh and tyrannical. Behind the moving mass paces a noble form yet stern of feature; and the wounded and downtrodden know his healing power; and with their dying gaze they look up to the face that bends over their cureless agonies and upon its rugged lineaments they see the sweetest smile that ever lit mortality. Before it the shadowy film of pleasure fades like mist, and the nakedness of life appears and the vanity and ghastliness of all their strugglings. But only when "the long task of life is done" do most remember the austere but loving face. For it is the face of duty. Harsh it seems to all but the thoughtful few that leave the current of the world and see through the delusion men ever follow. And most like Antony find death before they see reality.

But of the few that know the truth of duty and of pleasure our poet now was one. He shook himself clear of the phantom-seeking crowd and here he tells how even the noblest pilgrims to the shrine of love and beauty meet ignominious death, with eyes still blinded and soul deluded. Make a nature gifted with all genius, and brightened with every generous emotion, and place it on the throne of human empire, circled with all that power and luxury and passion can give; yet endow it only with the love of pleasure and blind it to the nobleness of duty. And this Antony will be the issue:—tragic agony and folly, heart-rending waste of

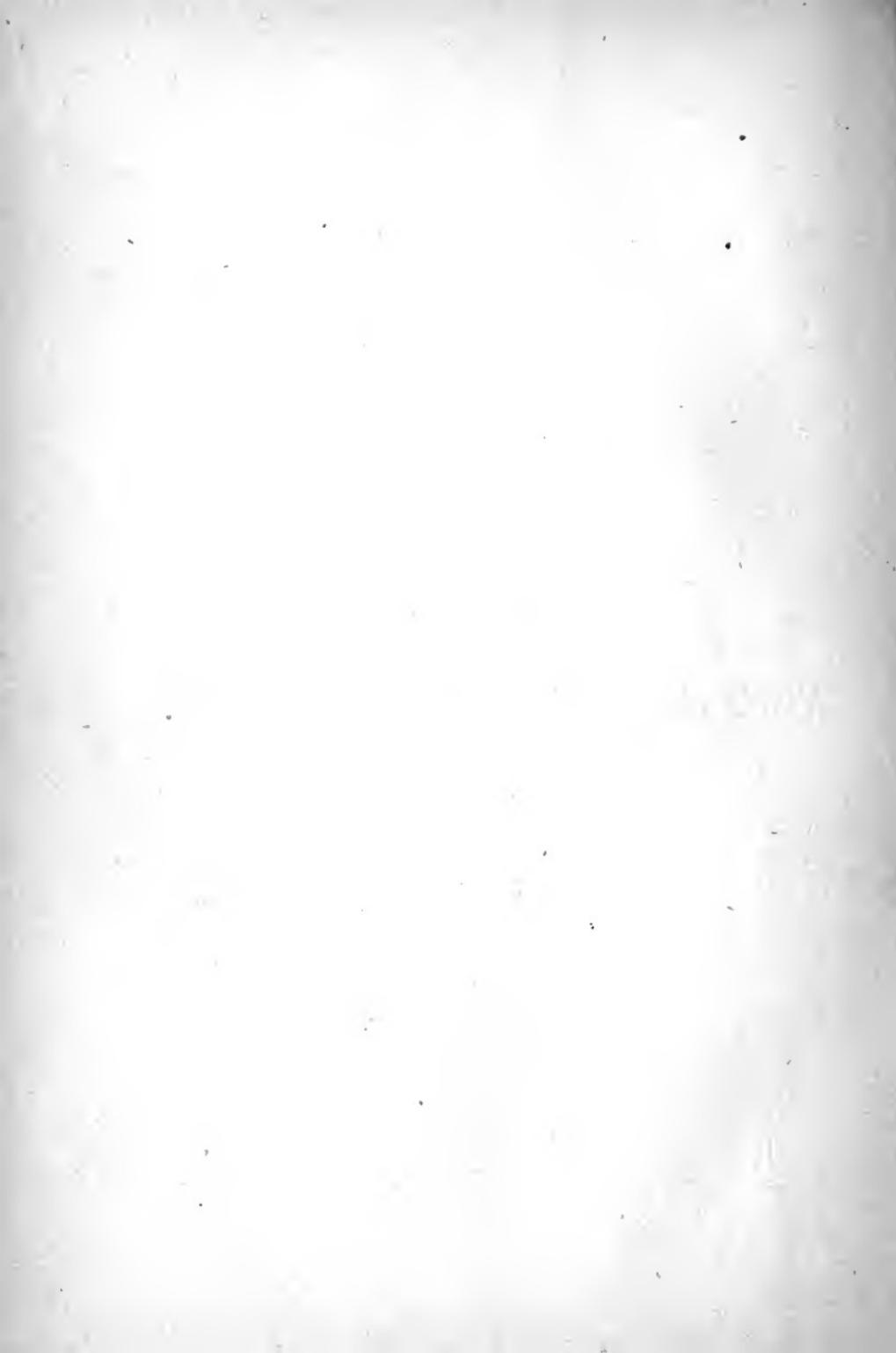
life, endless illusion and decay. From the dire spectacle  
the poet turns away to duty and we can almost hear him  
whisper with his brother of our age ;

“ Stern law-giver, yet thou dost wear  
The Godhead’s most benignant grace ;  
Nor know we anything so fair  
As in the smile upon thy face ;  
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds ;  
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;  
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;  
And the most ancient heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong. ”

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THE  
WOMEN OF THE ROMAN PLAYS.



## THE WOMEN OF THE ROMAN PLAYS

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THE romance of man's attitude to woman has been the material of half the imaginative literature of the world. There is more epigram than truth in the famous classification of the objects of his worship and delight "wine, woman, and song". Wine and song are the merest trifles in the life of man or in history compared with woman. The palate and the ear are not to be put in the same scale with the heart. In spite of the importance that the temperance movement proves to attach to wine, and the high place that poets take in all civilisation, wine and song are feeble instruments in the process of civilisation compared with the third item of the list.

In fact the position of woman in a nation or era or race is a clear test of its stage of development. For it reveals the state of intelligence and the virtues of all the men ; it tells whether they have cast out the mere animal appetites, and whether though civilised they still have to uphold their power and dignity by enslavement of others. We see in savage races the women bought and sold as the burden-bearers ; the men go out to war with their enemies and when they return pass their time in revel and sleep, whilst their wives and daughters have to slave for their enjoyment. A great advance upon this is their position in the civilised states of the East—where they live lives of complete seclusion ; the only one of the opposite sex they ever see is their husband or son ; they are kept like hot-house plants from the touch or sight of all the outside world ; their existence is blanched and colourless, and they have to live and die at the beck of their lord. And this subservience is exaggerated by Mahomedanism and its harems ; they are little better than chattels. The cause of this state of affairs is that, with its wide contrasts between wealth and poverty

and its system of castes, the East is incapable of democracy and its idea of the essential equality of the souls of mankind.

Greece shows a considerable advance upon this; for it had a progressive civilisation and developed republics; and wives were more of helpmeets there. Yet there was a strong tinge of Orientalism in her attitude towards women even to the last; she thought that their best virtue was to remain unseen and unheard, to be the domestic drudges whilst the men enjoyed the open-air public life of politics, art, and war. There are romantic feminine careers in Greece, as those of Helen and Antigone, Sappho and Aspasia; but they are exceptions and they had to abandon the natural rights of women and the respect due to them.

The attitude of Rome is a finer one; all through the history of that republic, there is a noble relationship between mother and son if not between husband and wife. The mother of Coriolanus has supreme influence over him to turn him from his unpatriotic purpose, and the mother of the Gracchi became almost a proverb for nobleness of maternal authority. In the earlier ages women were as a matter of course thrust more into the background, war being the sole pursuit that brought any honour; and their legal position of inferiority to husbands and brothers and even to their male children, of almost absolute nonentity down even to the empire was the record of their actual position in the far past. But as civilisation and culture grew, their influence rose both in society and state and stood out in relief against the language of the laws.

If we are to believe Tacitus, there was even during the empire a striking contrast between the position of Roman women and that of German women. And undoubtedly amongst the Teutonic peoples there ever has been a larger female influence because of the importance of their home life; whilst it was the disappearance of the life of the hearth and the corruption and ruin of family relationships that were at the root of the impurity of the Roman Empire. Further nomad tribes like the Germans that the historian describes are likely to have hardy and strong-charactered women, ready to take part in the pursuits of the men and to support them in difficulties.

Christianity came and theoretically placed the woman on the same footing as the man before God, but ultimately left her much as she had been in the practical sphere, excluding her from the priesthood and all offices of the church and at last even from all influence in marriage over the priesthood. The socialistic democracy that was the very essence of the religion vanished before the growth of a wealthy hierarchy. And thus it had little effect on the position of women. It was the Reformation with its emphasis on individual judgment that gave them scope again and made a Queen Elizabeth possible. But not till civilised Europe rose against slavery and abolished it was there able to appear the true democratic principle that acknowledges the worth of woman in her sphere as equal to man's worth in his. A principle when violated has its revenge in domains far beyond its own. As long as men can tyrannise over any human being as a legal right, they will be inclined to treat all the weaker humanity as subject. And as a fact it is since the origination of the antislavery movement that women have begun to take such an important place in modern civilisation, in art, in literature, in administration, in teaching and even in public life. It is the removal of this slur upon humanity that has made the influence of a queen's reign like that of Victoria so great. Never has civilisation approached so near to the democratic view of woman's position.

Shakespeare lived in a period that had not reached so high a standard of culture or morality. And yet there was a woman on the English throne, and she showed herself as great a sovereign as any that ever ruled. Whilst many noble women had by their education and character risen to some contemporary fame. It was natural then that he should give a place of great importance to women characters in his plays. In his comedies and romances he has credited them with supreme influence in love; in his tragedies he has of course brought them within the sphere of woe; but in his English histories where they might have been left out of the tragic atmosphere they are all acquainted with grief,—their faces are of the saddest. His thought perhaps was that, if women were dragged into public life, their existence became more sorrowful and their destiny more tragic than men's; theirs was a more delicate and passionate nature

and would soon suffer from the storms that leave the harsh masculine fibre unharmed.

In his Roman plays the women though still sad have more enjoyment in life, and even in their tragedy have a nobler rôle to play. Some of the women of the English histories are furies, others are weak sufferers trampled on by the rude foot of war and injustice. There is something bolder and stronger in most of his Roman women; they can stand up against the surge of circumstance and wrestle with their fate. He had come to have a deeper reverence for the character of woman and for her part in life before he reached his tragic period. He had doubtless met nobler and more capable if not more masculine women, women who could control themselves and deal with affairs in a masterly way. And hence his Helena and Isabella, his Olivia and Viola, his Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia, his Lady Macbeth and Imogen. He was thus prepared to appreciate the character and position of women in the later Roman republic. The strong-charactered English women of the reign of Elizabeth are the women of his Roman plays, so closely were they like in reality.

In Julius Cæsar and Coriolanus his first and last Roman play they take but small share in the action and appear but seldom. And this is quite in consonance with the Roman idea of women,—that however much they might influence their husbands and sons by the hearth they should not come forth into public life. Calphurnia appears once with her husband in public, but it is at a great ceremony in which sterile women were greatly interested and her part is but a passive one. Her only other appearance is in the dream scene, and there is scarcely sufficient in her utterances to decide upon her character. She has called out in her sleep “Help ho! they murder Cæsar!” Her whole thoughts are manifestly wrapped up in him. And her love is imperious; for her first words are

“What mean you Cæsar? think you to walk forth?  
You shall not stir out of your house to-day.”

There is something of a masculine tone in this, not the affectionate pleading of a loving woman’s heart stirred to alarm. And though it is she who recounts the wonders and portents that have occurred, and says she fears them, she

prefaces her speech with "I never stood on ceremonies." This is the first time she has bent her soul to superstition ; her great husband has been before her and felt its power, when through all his life he had been sceptic. She argues with him against his unwise confidence after all the omens. And her last word in the play is the suggestion of a diplomatic nature ; when he tells Decius to tell the senate he will not come that day, she suggests "Say he is sick", and he bursts out with "Shall Cæsar send a lie?" She is womanly in her fears and in her solicitude for him, but she is not womanly in her manner of expression ; she is bold and diplomatic. Perhaps the poet means to imply that the childlessness had deprived her of the discipline in love and self-control that brings out the finest qualities of the woman.

Yet Portia is as far as the play tells us childless too, and she is the model of a Roman wife, strong, loving, helpful, and tender ; there is scarcely any virtue that we would not think of in connection with her. She is the Roman complete, worthy of her father Cato and her husband Brutus, without losing the least tinge of womanliness. In Plutarch she is a nobly drawn portrait ; on Shakespeare's page her picture is one of those miniatures that occupy so little canvas and yet strike us with the perfection of their art. She appears in only two brief scenes and yet we seem to know her better than any character but Brutus. Not till he is past the throes of his great spiritual conflict does she appear, not till he has settled it for patriotism against friendship. She has seen how moody he is and she has tried to find out the cause and, being rudely repulsed, retired like a perfect wife unwilling to irritate him and

" hoping it was but an effect of humour

Which sometime hath his hour with every man."

But the terrible night of the conspiracy she has watched him get up at midnight and seen "six or seven men" enter

" who did hide their faces  
Even from darkness".

A foolish woman would not have failed to show that she was awake when he rose, and would have made a scene when she saw the masked faces enter. Within her there is a tempest of feeling, so great indeed that she seems not

even to notice the commotion in nature without, the portents of the elements. Yet she curbs it till the conspirators are gone ; she knows a crisis in their married life has come and, with the strange stoicism of the noblest natures in the last days of the Republic and the early days of the empire, she inflicts a wound upon herself that without being vital might be the final argument of appeal. Thus bodily pained and thus fortified she enters to the great conflict with the distracted soul of her husband.

The interview is one of the most powerful and dramatic in Shakespeare, and with all the masculine strength she has displayed there is here all the loving, weakhearted, appealing woman. She has no imperious airs like Caesar's wife, but the brave self-controlling gentleness and yieldingness of the true woman. She adores her husband and would bow before his will, but that she knows it now to be the turning-point of their married life ; she feels that he is alienated by some more absorbing emotion than her love ; the true wife is jealous of all such distracting thoughts that withdraw her husband from her ; but she will bear with them in silence, suffer long isolation for his sake, up till the point of alienation ; and there she will make a stand ; there she must share his thoughts or lose his love. It is not curiosity impels Portia to know the secrets of her Brutus ; it is the imperious claims of her heart telling her he is drifting away from her life and confidence. She will not accept his futile attempt to put her appeal aside by saying he is sick. She falls upon her knees and claims the right to know why he is heavy in heart, she appeals to the "great vow that did incorporate and make them one", and brings out with clearness the true nature of marriage, not to dwell "but in the suburbs of his good pleasure" ; he grants she is

"As dear to him as are the ruddy drops  
That visit his sad heart".

But that concession is not all she wants. She thinks it is because she is a woman he will not entrust his secrets to her ; and she pleads that "so father'd and so husbanded" she is stronger than her sex. And when all has failed she falls back upon her last and strongest plea ; knowing how stern and unyielding her husband could be she has inflicted a wound upon herself to show how far she could go and yet

not break confidence with him. And at the tale of the stoic bravery his reserve gives way and he bursts into admiration ;

“ O ye gods

Render me worthy of this noble wife ”.

And yet, with all her almost masculine nerve, she shows herself still woman, after the secret is imparted. Her husband has gone to the Capitol and it takes her all her control to keep the dread knowledge within her own breast, whilst she knows the tragic scene is enacting ; she cannot rest ; she must be talking to vent the wild passion of curiosity that surges in her heart ; yet she can talk of nothing but the great topic. Her impatience and nervousness make every minute an age, every word a disclosure, every sound an echo of the tragedy.

“ O constancy, be strong upon my side !

Set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue !

I have a man's mind, but a woman's might.

How hard it is for women to keep counsel.”

“ Hark boy ! what noise is that ? ”

“ Ah me ! how weak a thing

The heart of woman is ! ”

“ Sure the boy heard me ” ;

“ O, I grow faint ; ”,

“ Run, Lucius and commend me to my lord ;

Say I am merry.”

And after this scene closes she appears no more in the drama. Yet her last hours play a large part in the death of the heroes. At the close of the quarrel with Cassius, Brutus sighs out

“ O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs ” ;

“ Portia is dead ”.

And he tells how she had grown distracted with grief at his absence and at the strength of his foes and did herself to death. Then he will speak no more of her. But her brave example, we see, cuts him off from love of life and bids him follow her. Such is the true Roman wife, and the true English wife of the Elizabethan age, that bears all the woes of her husband, and, when she sees them past remedy, crosses the dark river first to show him the way.

It is a like spirit inflames the heart of Volumnia the mother of Coriolanus. But she has none of the gentleness

of Portia, none of the love and womanly tenderness that atmosphere the Roman will with beauty. She adds to the bravery and power to face death an unflinching imperiousness that commands only reverence. Years have passed since the great queen passed away and purified the memory of her character of its ignoble elements. And it is her ennobled picture that rests in the poet's mind as he paints this haughty, diplomatic, unbending Roman woman. The outlines are to be found in Plutarch's pages, but not the full-and lifelike figure. That he finds in the dead and glorified Elizabeth. And her he paints as she was in her greatest days before the Armada ; but he idealises the character, he strips it of its caprices and vanity and imagines it as it would have been in matronhood with a noble son to succeed upon the English throne. The study of Volumnia's individuality acquires a deeper interest from this shadowing of the English queen.

She differs from her son in being less egotistical. He is swallowed up by the thought of his dignity and cares not for country, or class, or even family, provided he has his passion of first pride and then revenge gratified. She can put all her natural affections aside if only her dear land be saved. Rome stands first in her love and then her son ; and, though for the latter her maternal emotion is a consuming fire, it is stifled when her city is in danger from it. Her sole thought is his honour and advancement till they joined with the Volscians threaten to light up Rome with destroying fires; if her appeal to his filial love and patriotism will not turn him from his revenge, then she will die in the flames. But as long as her country is safe, her one passion is to see Coriolanus advanced in the Roman army and the Roman state. She gloats on the picture she draws of him striking and being struck in battle and knows by heart the number of the wounds his body bears. It is only the poet's knowledge of Roman customs that prevents him making her lead the army like Elizabeth at Tilbury. Though she is pure and noble, she is kin in the boldness of her action and eloquence, in the power and fury of her character with all the worst women of his tragedies, with Goneril and Regan and with Lady Macbeth. In her wild anger and power of conveying it she is sister to Queen Margaret in Richard the

Third. Her eloquence of invective to the tribunes far surpasses that of her son to the mob ; we pity them and feel thankful that such boldness and power of tongue are rare in public or in private life. Yet it is only the whirlwind of such eloquence that could turn the fell purpose of her son. It is only her patriotism ennobles it and her pride in her motherhood. We shrink before such imperious women ; for they add to their overwhelming passions and power of speech the woman's claim to be unanswered with like galling words from the opposite sex ; they taunt and goad men to speech of like kind and yet know that most men dare not use the same weapons or even their own, those of muscular strength. Doubtless many and the poet amongst them must have felt the maddening sting of Elizabeth's eloquence, as the tribunes and as Coriolanus felt that of Volumnia's. And another trait this Roman matron had in common with the virgin queen was her machiavellianism ; to gain her end, she thought it mattered not what means she used. The advice she gives her son about wooing the people's votes for the consulship sounds like a page out of The Prince of Machiavelli, or like a passage out of Elizabeth's diplomacy. She bids him hide his real feelings in hypocritic flattery till he gains the honour ;

“ Now this no more dishonours you at all  
Than to take in a town with gentle words ”.

She does not bid him root out his haughtiness, but only dissemble it. She does not show him the rightful claims the people have to know his political views, but only how to delude them. Far nobler is her son in his scorn of such falsity ;

“ Must I with base tongue give my noble heart  
A lie that it must bear ? ”  
“ Away my disposition and possess me  
Some harlot's spirit.”

She has pride as great, scorn of the people as deep ; but she has not the candour and love of truth of the manly warrior. And by her powerful jesuitry she brings her country into deadly peril and her loved son to the most ignominious end—the death of an exile and traitor. For strong as his will is, she has a stronger and by her maternal

authority and love bends him to the base course. Had she left him to his better instincts, he would have refused to enter into the ignoble world of politics ; there would have been no collision between the people and him, no exiling, no attempt to revenge his exile by leading the Volscians against Rome and no tragic and mean end of him amongst his foes. Imperiousness of nature in women, if it is to bring anything but evil to men, should be linked with the deepest reverence for all that is true and good.

It was nature with her law of compensation that impelled the proud, strong-willed, fiery warrior Coriolanus to seek as his mate his antithesis and complement, the humble, loving, timid Virgilia. Qualities, virtues, vices, and characters attract their opposites. And thus in marriage you will rarely find the husband and wife of the same temperament ; and it is better if fire and will exist in the pair (and the work of life will be poorly done without them) that they be not on the female side of the household, as they must have been in Volumnia's. This is the tacit means nature has of preventing the growth of single passions or emotions or characters to a harmful extent in families and individuals ; for the children of two of the same temperament or ruling habit of mind would be maimed in life by having too much of it. It is in tastes that the unity and similarity should appear ; for these will reappear in the children in increased strength and make them more effective in the sphere of labour they choose for themselves. Unfortunately for the household of Coriolanus, Virgilia has a horror of all his pursuits, shrinks from the thought of blood and wounds or even military glory, and she hates the thought of their child developing such tastes. There is then far less sympathy between Coriolanus and his wife than between him and his mother. Theirs is a household that suffers from the greatest of household evils—the tyranny of a mother-in-law. The very virtues of Volumnia, her purity, her matronly love, her ruthless trenchancy of speech and her common sense (in this last most like to Queen Elizabeth and surpassing all the characters in the play) make her rule all the more galling for those whom she directs.

Of like character and power must have been Fulvia, Antony's wife, who does not appear but is only mentioned

in the play that bears his name ; for her death is reported in the first act. She has headed an army first against Antony's brother and then with him and Octavius, but is driven from Italy only to die. Antony, bold and warrior-like though he is, has manifestly been the subject of her strong will ;

“There's a great spirit gone”

he cries ; and afterwards to Augustus Cæsar he says ;

“As for my wife,

I would you had her spirit in such another ;  
The third o' the world is yours ; which with a snaffle  
You may pace easy, but not such a wife.”

Cleopatra in jealousy calls her “shril-tongued” and taunts him with her scolding. Plainly Fulvia is Volumnia in the later degenerate days of the Republic. And the meek Virgilia is foreshadowed in Octavia the sister of Octavius and the second wife of Antony. She makes no remonstrance against her brother's use of her as “the cement of” his and Antony's “love”, as but an instrument of policy. She is the silent, self-restraining, true Roman woman of all times, willing ever to submit to the necessities of the family. Cold and unresponsive demureness is her most striking characteristic. It is her virtue and her fault too. Even Cleopatra that most captious critic of other women speaks of “her modest eyes and still conclusion” and her “sober eyes”. But everyone speaks of her silence and self-involvement ; even Enobarbus says “Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation” and he sees the inevitable result of the match, greater estrangement between the two rulers of the world.

For Enobarbus knows the fascinations of her rival in Egypt especially for Antony.

“He will to his Egyptian dish again”.

He describes in glowing poetry how “she pursed up his heart” when first she met him “upon the river of Cydnus”;

“It beggar'd all description”.

Never would Antony leave her.

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety”.

She is the very opposite of Octavia's “beauty, wisdom, modesty”. We can scarcely think of two such natures

belonging to the same humanity—the staid, cold, self-containing Roman matron, and the false, fickle, passionate Egyptian. The two are meant to show the contrast between the East with its tropical civilisations, its childish despotisms and slaveries and the West with its hardy characters accustomed to meet the obstacles of nature and overcome them. Cleopatra is the most magnificent, most elaborate and most difficult of all Shakespeare's portraits of women. In all the others there is some single predominant trait that unifies the whole character. She unites in herself in almost equal proportions masculine strength of will with cowardly timidity, the sublime grandeur of a god with the caprice and weakness of a child, the imperial attitude of a mighty potentate with the frivolity of a coquette, the ambitions of an eastern despot with the irresponsibility of a slave, the brilliant imagination of a poet and fine taste of an artist with the uncultured violence and free tongue of a boor, fiery devotion to her lover with supreme selfishness, unbounded generosity with the most peevish jealousy, the tenderness and sympathy of a true woman with a harlot's coarse vanity, trustless and mercenary oaths, and simulation of love.

Yet we feel the picture to be real as nature herself. She is like one of our transition days between summer and winter, when we have specimens of all the climates of the world museumed into twenty-four hours. We pity Antony for his slavery and degeneration, yet we envy him the sublimation of his pleasures. He rises to an elevation of fancy, of ambition, of desire, of thought that seems to take worlds and empires within the limits of a single passion. Yet it is only fancy; for the very marrow is gone from his bones; this "herculean Roman" has become

"the bellows and the fan  
To cool a gipsy's lust".

We are sorry to look upon this titanic representative of a stoic warrior-race and see him vacillate to every caprice of this imperial jilt; for we know with Enobarbus that he will never throw off her thraldom; she can fool him "to the top of his bent"; and with all his greatness of nature she knows every stop of it; she crosses his every mood till he is mad with the stings of her brilliant wit; but she knows the limit

and turning round into caresses she makes him as mad with fond passion by as brilliant flatteries. She is a consummate actress too, as well as the embodiment of caprice and passion; what a glorious scene of sensuous allurement she makes for the first meeting with him on the river Cydnus; even the cynical humourist Enobarbus breaks into poetry at the memory of it; she is imperial in her theatricality, as she is imperial in her most frivolous whims; she throws an atmosphere of luscious imagination around all she does and says; she deals ever in hyperbole; her every passion is a hyperbole; her very existence is hyperbole. But she never makes her sublime so excessive as to step into ridicule, she never permits her stagery to pass into melodrama. Her whole life is too much of an ecstasy, she has too much wild enjoyment of the moment to let the mere histrionic pleasure master her. Her admiration and love of Antony are of the senses, sensuous; yet they are fervid and absorbing while she has them; they are volcanic in their fitfulness and irresistible power: the hardest virtue becomes molten before their heat. Yet it is the histrionic element in her nature that makes her meet death so courageously; she imagines so vividly the scene in Rome when she will be led in triumph and staged for the delight of the "shouting varlety"; and she cannot bear it; she resolves to die; and she enters the other world with the same passion, the same striking attitudes and the same imperious grace and consciousness of a world-audience as she had lived with.

For this marvellous portrait of a woman's nature undoubtedly Elizabeth sat in the studio of Shakespeare's memory. He remembered the wilful, often violent, large-natured, pettily-jealous queen, full of contradictions of character, repulsive and yet fascinating in her moods and tempers, passing from woer to woer in her magnificent caprice, frivolous and yet great, a woman in her vices and yet a man in her will and imperious mien. He forgot the stinginess and unlovely vanities of her later years and imagined her in her youth when she had the world at her feet. She was as histrionic, as passionate, as imperial in her frivolities, as masterful over men, as violent to her inferiors, as jealous of rivals as Cleopatra is in this drama. She had as great a genius, as splendid an imagination, as uncertain a temper.

In fact there is no woman of history approaches so near to Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

But how different the ends! The English queen declined and was at last the shadow of her former greatness. Gaunt and unlovely, she clung to all her vanities and coyed and passioned as if she still were queen of beauty. Fit bride for death, she still would smile on youth and love. She sat in the banqueting hall of the worm, around her nothing but the trophies and foreshadowings of the grave; yet all of them were but mirrors of the beauty and worship that had vanished in the past. And one glimpse of the reality, one tone of truth roused the old violence and fury now toothless and weak. She shut her eyes to the inevitable fate that threw its shadow on her, and thought she would bar out the loathsome vision. But it crept upon her and, gleaming with its death-lights through her thin, weary eyelids, made her the prey of shuddering and horror. Over her loomed the ghastly tyrant with his grinning skull, and at his bony feet she lay prostrate and with passionate tears pleaded respite. And feeling it was in vain she turned and wreaked her old violence upon her subjects; for the slave is ever tyrant. Death has new horrors from this royal conquest.

How like his stroke is to "a lover's pinch" when he attacks the Eastern queen! Not a glimpse of his dread glance and loathsome sneer do we catch as he leads this royal slave through his dusty portal. Imperial purple he wears, around him breezes waft sweet perfume, and his voice is a lullaby, full of sleepful music; he has the features of his twin brother, only more soft and sensuous, the nurse of joyful dreams, the friend of love, the usher of paradise. As soon as Antony dies, we feel there is no space for her large passions in life; she must seek their sating in a more spacious sphere. We know the cold and politic Octavius will never yield to her entrancing tongue. She has reached the climax of her life in her "mailed Bacchus", her herculean warrior. Never such a lover can be found on this side the grave. What is there left for her but indignity and pain to suffer? With her timid heart she has hitherto shrunk from the very thought of death. But now her gorgeous fancy tricks him out with all that is fair in existence; now he holds her Antony within his realm, she fears him

not. She will go to meet him and not wait his welcome touch.

“ It were for me

To throw my sceptre at the imperious gods ;  
To tell them that this world did equal theirs  
Till they had stol’n our jewel ”.

“ Our lamp is spent, it’s out ! Good sirs, take heart  
We’ll bury him ; and then, what’s brave, what’s noble,  
Let’s do it after the high Roman fashion  
And make death proud to take us ”.

“ It is great

To do that thing that ends all other deeds ;  
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change ”.

“ I dream’d there was another Antony ;  
O such another sleep, that I might see  
But such another man ! ”

“ His legs bestrid the ocean ; his rear’d arm  
Crested the world ; his voice was propertied  
As all the tuned spheres.”

“ In his livery

Walk’d crowns and crownets ; realms and islands were  
As plates droppe’d from his pocket ” ;

“ To imagine

An Antony, were nature’s piece ’gainst fancy  
Condemning shadows quite ”.

Her whole nature is wrought up to meet the dark mystery,  
to solve the great perhaps. For now she has no doubt that  
she will see her “ Mars”, her “ man of men ”.

“ My resolution’s placed ; and I have nothing  
Of woman in me ; now from head to foot  
I am marble-constant.”

“ Give me my robe, put on my crown ; I have  
Immortal longings in me.”

“ Methinks I hear  
Antony call ;”

“ husband, I come ” ;

“ I am fire and air ; my other elements  
I give to baser life ”.

She kisses her maidens and one of them falls dead ;

“ Dost thou lie still ?  
If thus thou vanishest, thou tell’st the world  
It is not worth leave-taking ” ;

“ If she first meet the curled Antony  
He’ll make demand of her and spend that kiss  
Which is my heaven to have ”.

She puts the asp to her bosom.

“ Peace, peace !

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast  
That sucks the nurse asleep ? ”

“ As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,—  
O Antony !—  
Why should I stay— ”

And death full twin of sleep whispers the answer out of life.  
Even the cold Octavius is touched to admiration as he comes across the crowned dead ;

“ she looks like sleep,  
As she would catch another Antony  
In her strong toil of grace ”.

There is a glamour even in the death from this fervid Eastern nature, the glamour of perfect stagery and illusion. But one thought of the evanescence of her passion and her glory, and the spell is broken. Who would suffer in her “strong toils” even to win her smiles and blandishments for ever ? Who would bear her whims and faithlessness even for the “life in Egypt” for “the dalliance and the wit” ? Who would let

“ the ever-shifting currents of the blood  
According to her humour ebb and flow ”,

only to have the heart fired with the flash of her “haughty smile” or with the tones of her many-passioned voice ? Better to die with Desdemona in her sweet, pale constancy, better with Ophelia in her pathetic madness, better with Cordelia in her broken-hearted silence of love ! The poet’s soul was sick of the demoniac witchery of such fickle and voluptuous passion, and he turned from it, even glorious as it seemed in death, weary of its irrationality and tempests. Even the haughty patriotism and overbearing will of Volumnia was relief beside it ; for in her there was faith and trust. It is the still and shrinking modesty of Virgilia he loves thereafter, and the cold, pure constancy of Valeria,

“ The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle  
That’s curdied by the frost from purest snow  
And hangs on Dian’s temple ”.

His Northern nature takes the mastery of him again ; and it can never more feel delight in the never-resting humours of meretricious love. It is the still shy sweetness of maiden chastity, or the noble dignity of matron faithfulness that

draws the last years of his imagination. The rank growth of tropic passion soon taints the very life and leaves the greatest powers the prey of plague and death. Imogen, Hermione, and Miranda are the ideals of his last days ; the fair sweet trustful nature, open as the day, strong in its one love to the death ;

“ A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye  
Fair as a star when only one  
Is shining in the sky ”.

Such is the love, he now knows, will stand by us when fortune has left us and the cold world frowns ; such is the nature that will be our stay when we enter the valley of the shadow of death. Happy he who has such pure and star-like constancy to follow him through life.

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THE FELLOW-CONSPIRATORS  
OF BRUTUS.



## THE FELLOW-CONSPIRATORS OF BRUTUS.

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OF good there are degrees. There is the cold virtue that watches its integrity and keeps it unstained, incapable of, afraid of any generous burst of passion, lest it sully the upright principle within. This we honour, but never love. And there is the holiness that is but worshipful integrity, uprightness towards the infinite source of life ; it finds its feelings so absorbed in adoration that it cannot think of men except as vile stains upon the robe of deity ; it will do no wrong ; it will have no active relations with the world lest the things of the world should draw it from its only aim. But highest of all is the active good that loves and errs from love, that cannot keep in bounds its generous heart, that heeds no scorn and slander of the world, and passes on its healing way amongst the wretched and downtrodden. Such is the supreme goodness from the human point of view.

Evil we so profess to loathe that we scarcely stay to give it grades and classes ; we think of it as simply the foe of all good, as midnight is the antithesis of noon. But a moment's thought reveals to us that here as elsewhere there is the more and less. We pity the evil that comes from the maddened brain, scarce conscious of its terrible purpose. We pardon that which is but the breach of human law or convention and that which goes with the rude life of outlaws and men of sturt and strife. The evil that has bright humour and often generosity with it even draws us to it. We have a secret admiration for bold courageous crime, that of the rebel against seeming injustice or power. We cannot avoid a sense of awe, if not respect, as we gaze at the Satan of Milton's Paradise Lost, so noble does he seem at first in his rebellion. Destructive, ravening evil, if it have no hesitation or cowardice in it, impresses us with fear but not with hate.

And yet we come here far up the scale of wickedness. We have not reached its climax till we see that which hides itself in darkness, and takes the sly and crawling forms of life. Whatsoever waits long periods for its victim, and seduces his friends and undermines his power and happiness we shudder at. It is the venomous and unseen powers of the world that make us loathe them. Nothing is so terrible and mysterious as the evil they work. Whenever we discover it in human nature we feel almost paralysed before it, it carries such a suggestion of omnipotence in it. Out of all the animal creation, we have chosen the most repulsive, most venomous, most crawling and most subtle form—the serpent to express the evil that we most detest and shrink from. And one of the meanings of the fall of man is that pure and innocent and upright natures are most open to the machinations of this subtle principle. Those who are worldly and cunning and false are its friends and know it so well that its attacks would fall powerless on them ; they carry in their systems the antidote against its poison, their own subtlety and disbelief in human goodness.

It is in secret conspiracy and midnight plotting that we find this basest of all evil concentrated amongst men. If a plot is to succeed it must be dark and subtle ; it must expand by intrigues and low and sly shifts and catch all the evil passions that tend to rise against its victim. It has no mercy, no nobleness, no virtue, no pity. It must seduce and ruin a thousand innocent hearts before it meets success. Its courage is that of the midnight assassin. Treachery and deceit live in every fold of its garments. Nothing is too gross or mean to be rejected as an instrument to work with. Hypocrisy and lying are its first acknowledged principles. Its ministers are ever “secret, black and midnight hags”. It voyages through life in a

“fatal and perfidious bark  
Built in the eclipse and rigged with curses dark”.

Its whole nature seethes with corruption, yet it wears a face of innocence. It is “procress to the lords of hell”, yet seems as an angel come from heaven. There can be no joy within it. or in anyone who comes in contact with it. It is the Inferno of all souls who are engulfed by it.

Shakespeare had seen the horror and loathsomeness of it during the reign of the great queen. Plot after plot arose against her, revealing a vile and subtle life underground, throughout the whole of England. He must have touched the poison here and there, as he travelled with his company over the land or penetrated into the tavern life of London ; he must have seen the treachery and venom that it bred in every nature within its sphere. For in his comedies and histories he has shown the havoc it works in all the life it reaches. In Henry the Fourth and even in his great son Henry the Fifth the poison works in upon natures fundamentally noble and taints every faculty and feeling ; it enfeebles powerful minds and makes them lose all dignity and self-respect ; it drives them to self-deceit in attempting to deceive others. It implants a habit of hypocrisy and acting in their characters and this corrupts and moulders away everything that is strong or wholesome in them. In Much Ado we see falsity and plotting work upon a mean and petty nature and ruin it for ever. Don John and his followers Conrade and Borachio exercise their treacherous minds upon the gentlest and most unoffending of victims, Margaret, and have no pleasure in their plots. And in Richard the Third the diabolical side of evil makes its nearest approach to sublimity of form ; that traitor lies and seduces and undermines and murders till his whole world is honeycombed with villainy, and at last it crashes down, burying him in its ruins. Nothing pure or noble can live within the tainted atmosphere of conspiracy.

Finally in Julius Cæsar he found an opportunity to study the self-destructive power of plotting. He had already experienced amongst his friends and patrons how it ruined their world for them. Only a few years before he had seen the man he honoured most amongst the nobles—the Earl of Essex—led by envy of Elizabeth or anger at her to join in a conspiracy against her ; and he was able to look into the very hearts of him and his followers and see the corroding force of secrecy upon all virtuous emotion and purpose. Thus had he the knowledge to deal with the loftier forms of conspiracy ; and he chose the most exalted in the pages of history, that which had resounded down the aisles of the centuries. If he was to find greatness or virtue

in any plot, surely he would find it in that which so patriotically tried to turn back the tide of history, surely he would find it in that which laid the mighty Julius low.

Here then, as he saw the great Elizabeth decline towards death, as he saw the great century of the Armada pass away, he turned back to the greatest crisis in the world's affairs and, that he might warn his noble friends from the intrigues and plots that were undermining their natures, as well as the influence of their rivals, he made a keen, impartial study of conspiracy. His whole heart and mind is set against it ; for he sees that it can end even if successful only in ruin ; if it is a failure the tragedy will be external ; if it wins its purpose, then there will be a still greater tragedy—that of the spirit ; for it is the evil in it that succeeds and it will not rest with one success ; it will fear around it plots like that by which it gained its end ; it will have its mind full of suspicion and doubt even of its friends ; all its world will seem undermined and hollow ; never will rest again come to the weary mind, or sweet sleep visit the eyes without awful dream. Successful deceit or conspiracy has within it an infinite brood like itself ; it will never find surcease. And there lies its punishment—that it is undying in this life at least. Far happier is the fate of those who fail in the attempt and die. The evil taint has no more space or sphere in life.

The feeling of the poet with regard to conspiracy is put into the mouth of his noblest character—Brutus, when his page announces to him at night the arrival of Cassius and others

“ their hats pluck'd about their ears  
And half their faces buried in their cloaks ”;

“ O Conspiracy !  
Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,  
When evils are most free ? O, then, by day  
Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough  
To mask thy monstrous visage ? Seek none, Conspiracy ;  
Hide it in smiles and affability :  
For if thou path, thy native semblance on,  
Not Erebus itself were dim enough  
To hide thee from prevention ”.

Such is the full philosophy of plot and intrigue, from one who touches it and yet means to have no taint from it. Its

blackness of hue would warn all men of it; and hence it has to wear the mien of innocence and brightness. And it is ever so; it throws a shadow upon courtesy and smiles; it draws the trail of the serpent over the appearance of honest affability. For "one may smile and smile and smile and be a villain" all the world over and not in Hamlet's Denmark alone. And it is only cunning men of the world who can see the overacting of the smile and know the deep purpose underneath. The smiling affable villain with the highest reputation for probity and courtesy you can see on all sides, most sweetly familiar with his victims and tools, confiding to their flattered ears the airy, secret nothings that cost him nothing and come not near his purpose. And once on this road, there is nothing he will not stoop to, to gain his end, no character or mode of talk he will not assume and act it well. You need not look for intriguer written on his brow in dark lines of hatred and deceit, unless he has been long at the trade and fallen low. Seek for your midnight conspirator amongst the gayest of the gay, amid smiling innocence and affable manliness. It is only as life draws near its close, and the game is played out, that you will find him wear his cloak of gloom before the eyes of men.

But as a rule the intriguing spirit, unless it has suffered but for a brief period the corrupting power of its occupation, and has had a deep abiding nobleness in it to begin with, becomes unfit for bold courageous act. It loves the darkness, the mask of insincerity, the petty and secret attack too much to abandon them. It will never take to the open bravery of the soldier again. And hence the strange phenomenon in this play—the disappearance from the stage of all the conspirators except Brutus and Cassius. Quite different names appear as the generals and lieutenants of the army. Casca, Trebonius, Ligarius, Decius Brutus, Metellus Cimber, and Cinna are seen no more after the assassination. Their natures, faulty and ignoble to begin with, would not bear the strain of loyalty to their new leaders. The taint of secrecy and bloodshed would never leave them. They were certain to become traitors to their cause as soon as it needed open and bold work. For they were but followers if not parasites of Brutus and when his project appeared a failure they would fall away. The veiling of the central sun of any plot makes such motes in his rays all vanish.

Yet they have each his part and distinct character. Cinna is nearest to a mere shadow ; his name being merely introduced to give point to the scene in which the poet of the same name is mistaken for him by the mob and torn to pieces. He appears thrice and only as the interlocutor and instrument of Cassius. He is eager to have Brutus on his side ; he is impressed by the strange sights he has seen that fearful night ; in the garden of Brutus he sees the break of day ;

“ and yon grey lines

That fret the clouds are messengers of day ” ;

he reminds Casca that it is he who is first to rear his hand ; and he is one of the last to add his “ O Cæsar ” rousing the arrogant cry of the victim

“ Hence ! wilt thou lift up Olympus ? ”

Ligarius has almost as slight a part. He is sent for by Brutus and comes from a sick-bed to express his absolute trust in the great Stoic and his readiness to see the meaning of the plot and join in it.

“ With a heart new fir'd I follow you  
To do I know not what ; but it sufficeth  
That Brutus leads me on.”

And Cæsar's anxiety about the health of Ligarius in the following scene lays ironical emphasis on the enterprise he has joined. Trebonius stands in the same strange cross-light. In the orchard scene, he acts but the echo of Brutus in opposing the death of Antony ; and in the following scene on Cæsar's bidding him remember to call on him that day and be near him, he answers aloud

“ Cæsar, I will ” ,

and in an aside

“ and so near will I be  
That your best friends shall wish I had been further ” .

Thus is brought out the mean nature of conspiracy that makes the trusted friend a hypocrite. At the assassination he does not appear ; for he has had the duty of decoying Antony.

Metellus Cimber is not so near the heart of Cæsar ; nor does he express such loyal trust in Brutus ; he is meant to be a colder-natured man and he can act the part of suppliant before the victim better than the others. He is

eager to have Cicero in the plot that his "silver hairs" may "purchase them a good opinion", and thus reveals a shallowness of insight into the vanity and impracticability of the orator and literary man. He is again interrupted and put down by Brutus after the assassination, when he says

"Stand fast together lest some friend of Cæsar's  
Should chance—".

Decius Brutus may be placed with him as playing as conspicuously repulsive a part. He urges in the midnight scene the slaughter of others besides Cæsar and displays the greatest confidence in his power to move the conqueror from any resolution by flattery.

"I can o'ersway him"

"Let me work ;

For I can give his humour the true bent".

And he fulfils his boast ; he turns the great hero round his finger by adroit interpretation of Calphurnia's dream and still more adroit flattery and appeal to his vanity and weaker thoughts ; he speaks of his "dear dear love" to Cæsar and his career and says that his reason is subject to his love. He seems to gloat over this almost needless deception of the great warrior ; and it is no derogation from the nobleness of Cæsar that he should thus be deceived ; for the nobler the nature, the more open it is to such vile traders on love and friendship. It is not uncommon to hear of men (chiefly vain youths or fools) pluming themselves upon having flattered some friend to the top of his bent, or having drawn him into dilation on his deeds or merits. In their extreme folly they are blind to the fact that they have revealed a base vein in their own natures and a noble one in their friend's, that of a trustful naturalness to those whom he esteems friends. They have claimed a kinship with Judas and been weak enough to be proud of it. We can reach no lower depth of wickedness, no more diabolic form of evil than this betrayal of a friend's trust and love. No more terrible fate in life is there than to be a Judas. And it lies before all who deal in conspiracy and intrigue, if death does not step in and arrest the descent. With Decius Brutus the corruption had gone too far for any remedy, when he could rely so much upon the trust of Cæsar in him as to speak to him of his "dear dear love" in

the very act of drawing him to his death. And to the last his victim trusts him ; before the first blow falls he kneels with pharisaic prayer, beginning "Great Cæsar", and the gentle questioning reply reveals how far the hero had been seduced into trust and love of the parasite :—

"Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?"

Casca's task pales before this monstrous treachery to love and trust. For he never pretends to love or even to favour the would-be king and looks for no love or favour in return. He is the strangest figure on the poet's canvas. He is the crabbed, cynical humourist of this play, yet so churlish and perverse in his manner that the humour almost vanishes. He is the first outline sketch of the humourist and cynic Apemantus in *Timon of Athens*. He snarls at Cæsar and his ambitions and timidities ; he snarls at Brutus when questioned by him about the offer of the crown. He thinks it was all mere foolery, not worth a thought. He laughs and sneers as much at the "tag-rag people" as at the wooer of their suffrages. He mocks Cicero with his pedantry and Greek, and Cassius who would know the purpose of the Greek.

"There was more foolery yet, if I could remember it".

He looks upon the whole matter, if not the whole of life, as a farce. Yet Cassius sees under his blunt cynicism capacity for

"any bold or noble enterprise".

And in the next scene we see him in quite a different light ; he is moved to the very soul by the wonders that occur around him, the shaken earth, the "tempest dropping fire", the hand all bright with flame and yet unscorched, the lion in the Capitol, the owl hooting in the forum at noon. Fear takes the mask of rudeness and cynical wit and shows us a mind all shaken with superstition. And this is more common than we suppose ; the boldest sneer is often but the armour of superstitious cowardice. The scene explains how Cassius was able immediately after to turn the porcupinish nature to his purposes ; it takes time to plant the seed of rebellion in his heart, but it is planted and planted beyond uprooting. And he shows the same reverence for the reputation of Brutus as the others. Yet in the orchard

he again returns to his wayward perversity and argues with the other conspirators about the breaking of the dawn. And he changes his dogmatic mind about Cicero ; first he abruptly says,

“ Let us not leave him out ”,  
and when Brutus cries,

“ O name him not ”,  
adds as abruptly,

“ Indeed he is not fit.”

But we hear no other word from him till the assassination ; though he is addressed by Cinna,

“ Casca, you are the first that rears your hand ”,  
he holds his tongue ; and when all have had their say to Cæsar he steps in with his dagger,

“ Speak, hands, for me ”.

Thus, in spite of his bristling manners and his superstitious fears, he is the man of most prompt action. ✓

But there towers above all the conspirators, both in keenness of judgment and force of character, the leader of both Brutus and them—Cassius—the lean man whom Cæsar fears most. All the rest vanish with the assassination ; he alone stands by Brutus in the surge of war ; he alone has strength of nature to come through the ordeal of conspiracy, has boldness and courage enough to take his place as general. The poet with his marvellous insight saw that revolution sweeps its pettier instruments aside as it passes from stage to stage ; only the genius of it can rise with it from wave to wave ; its first narrow-thoughted leaders are antiquated in a few days ; for its development is swift as lightning, once bloodshed is touched. Cromwell and Napoleon came after Shakespeare and yet the poet has the general formula for them in his mind. He makes only Brutus and Cassius, the men of noble or strong natures, outlive the hurricane so far as to fight their first battle. The rest of the conspirators vanish like moths and flies premonitory of the storm. Only the exceptional natures are capable of being both conspirators and warriors. And Cassius undoubtedly has exceptional powers ; and it is the consciousness of this that first stirs his heart to evil. ✓ A greater personality towers above him and he cannot bear

the proximity. It seems a slur upon his genius that this Colossus, Cæsar,

“ Doth bestride the narrow world ”.

Stars in the same sphere, they can no more hold their course together than Prince Hal and Hotspur. The lesser feels himself belittled by the presence and career of the greater. Brutus with the noble generosity that is the first essential of friendship feels no chagrin at the rise of Cæsar but only more admiration and more love for him. It is not till he sees the conqueror making for kingship and threatening to destroy the still-cherished liberties of his loved country that there awakens an antagonistic thought in his mind. Cassius feels no noble compunctions ; he has never loved Cæsar or been loved by him. His only emotion towards him is first jealousy, and then envy passing into active hatred. His arguments to Casca and even to Brutus are all based upon the injury to his egotism. The printer of his speeches would soon run out of capital “ I's ”. And to enlarge the size of this overweening letter, he sets himself to belittle Cæsar ; this poor half-drowned immortality

“ is now become a god ; and Cassius is  
A wretched creature and must bend his body  
If Cæsar carelessly but nod on him ” ;

“ this god did shake ;  
His coward lips did from their colour fly ” ;

“ Ye gods, it doth amaze me  
A man of such a feeble temper should  
So get the start of the majestic world ”.

“ A man no mightier than thyself or me  
In personal action, yet prodigious grown,  
And fearful, as these strange eruptions are ”.

“ What trash is Rome  
—when it serves

For the base matter to illuminate  
So vile a thing as Cæsar ! ”.

This bitter passion of envy has eaten up the whole of his strong, austere nature. And its destructive power could be no better seen than in one who has such strength of will, such far-seeing intellect and such capacity for uprightness. And when its influence is removed by the death of its object, we see the once noble mind rise above the wreckage of the storm and assert itself in the quarrel scene with Brutus. He has the first word of attack ; but he is also the

first to see the fatal breach that it is making in their friendship, the first to let his nobler emotions have expression ; driven to bay by the taunts and bitter language of his "brother", he sinks into deep despair ;

" Come Antony, and young Octavius, come,  
Revenge yourselves alone on Cassius ;  
For Cassius is aweary of the world :  
Hated by one he loves ; braved by his brother " ;  
                " Oh, I could weep  
My spirit from mine eyes ! ".

It is he who acts the more generous rôle in the scene ; for the old intolerance of all but his own upright principles returns to Brutus. Cassius has the swift penetration into character and conduct that a man of keen faculty and long experience of the world is sure to have in age. Only once is he inferior to Brutus in this respect and that is concerning the admission of Cicero into the plot ; he fails to see the intractability of the struggler after originality. But he sees into the heart of every practical difficulty, and he can mould the natures of his friends to his own will, austere and self-absorbed as he is ; he is master of himself and of Brutus too ; " He is " as Cæsar says

" a great observer and he looks  
Quite through the deeds of men ".

He is the deep thinker, too, that grows sleepless and lean with thought.

" Yond' Cassius has a lean and hungry look ;  
He thinks too much ; such men are dangerous ".

He is a puritan like Brutus, unseduceable by the frivolous pleasures of the world ;

" He loves no plays,  
As thou dost, Antony ; he hears no music :  
Seldom he smiles ; and smiles in such a sort  
As if he mock'd himself and scorn'd his spirit  
That could be mov'd to smile at anything.  
Such men as he be never at heart's ease  
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves ".

He can see and put the naked truth of any situation ; as e.g. that of republicanism ;

" I had as lief not be as live to be  
In awe of such a thing as I myself ".

But he has no great generous heart to stem the current of his worldliness. And he rushes into conspiracy and all its

dark thoughts. He is the head and soul of the plot. He sets himself to all the petty intriguing and deceit that it requires, as if he had been born to it. He knows the noble nature of Brutus and seduces him into it and sets all guards round him lest Cæsar should work upon his nobleness. And when the conspirators talk of what to do with Antony, he is all for bloodshed ; he would have been another Robespierre and inaugurated a reign of terror, so degenerate do such austere natures grow under the impulse of a vile passion. After the assassination he does not like Brutus appeal to Antony's reason and nobler feelings, but to his worldly interests ;

“ Your voice shall be as strong as any man's  
In the disposing of new dignities ”.

Had he managed the whole project, it might have been successful for a time.

It was a happy thing for his better nature that he failed ; for as soon as he sees it crumbling away beneath his feet, a melancholy settles on him and he rises to his most majestic attitude and falls to the weakness of common humanity. Epicurean and sceptic though he is, he feels the ominousness of the birds of prey flying over his army. And before the battle he succumbs to the sadness of his brooding spirit and takes farewell of his dear comrade ;

“ For ever and for ever, farewell, Brutus ! ”

In spite of his great courage, he loses in the battle, and he thinks, with his brooding melancholy, that Brutus is taken too.

“ O coward that I am, to live so long  
To see my best friend ta'en before my face ”.

He is even glad to give Cæsar his revenge by running on the sword that slew the conqueror. And before he dies, one utterance gives us a truer revelation of his soul than aught else ;

“ This day I breathēd first ”.

There we have the full confession ; all the secrecy and intrigue of the plot had been only stifling his better heart ; and now that he had come to open blows and could show his courage, he felt as if the choking weight had been lifted off. Glad he was to fight, glad to let his scheme fail, glad to welcome death ;

" time is come round  
And where I did begin, there shall I end ;  
My life is run his compass ".

It tells us the long agony of the envy and self-deception ; it tells us there has been no peace for the soul burdened with the foul conspiracy it had engendered and the cruel blunder it had committed ; it tells us, that soul had been most noble, to begin with, and still retained sufficient of its nobility to feel the sin. And this nobility the poet endorses by the utterances over his dead body ; listen to Titinius as he comes upon the woful scene ;

"Cassius is no more."

"The sun of Rome is set ! Our day is gone—

—our deeds are done!

“Why didst thou send me forth, brave Cassius?”

" Come, Cassius' sword, and find Titinius' heart ".

Nothing we feel could be so noble a eulogy as this self-slaughter; and yet another follows in the heart-broken eloquence of the great Stoic Brutus;

"The last of all the Romans, fare thee well !

It is impossible that ever Rome

Should breed thy fellow. Friends, I owe more tears

To this dead man than you shall see me pay."

Such noble tears seem to wash away the stain from the memory of the dead, if his large generosity in the quarrel scene and his great and manly courage had not already wiped it out. And yet it is the foulest stain can rest on human soul—to breed a midnight plot against an unsuspecting hero, to entrap him to his death, to bury the daggers of assassins in his defenceless body, and this for envy of his colossal greatness, and not, as in the case of Brutus, for patriotism and the old republican liberties of Rome. Little wonder that the poet paints in darkest colours the woe that overtook the souls of the conspirators, the gross disintegrating force of the treachery. We can pity or forgive all other sins, all other wrongs to man or heaven; this, this alone is past forgiveness, past hope; for it unsettles and corrupts the very heart, and turns it into a black fountain of deceit. It is the traitors of the world that have their names written almost as a curse in history.

My thoughts passed to the proverbial land of family feud that seek's revenge by treachery; and the long annals of

Italian poisonings and stabbings passed before me. I wound through the narrow high-walled lanes whose every door seemed red with blood. The noblest buildings of the flower town, its wealth of art, the wondrous efforts of its sculptors and painters threw a crimson shadow as if the sun were setting in a mist of blood. I found myself within the square of the duomo and up against the ensanguined sky rose the chequered marbles of Giotto's tower. The stars that began to peer forth seemed to crown it with a silver wreath of worlds, though the daylight lingered still and tears of blood fell from them. A strange sepulchral music chattered and shrieked from the organ within and made the dim air shake as with midnight fear. Up the broad flights of steps trooped shadowy figures each with the look of death and the stain of blood upon the lips and in the eyes the wild startled glance of one who meets defenceless a foe seeking for his life. I followed and within a spectre congregation stood rapt. The organ had ceased and a gaunt sheeted figure gestured fiercely from the pulpit. His hollow, awful voice was telling the story of the false disciple's kiss that led the master to the final agony. And the ghostly audience moved and swayed and shivered beneath the picture-eloquence like aspen leaves, and as the wolf-like flight of the traitor from the terrible sight of the cross rose before the mind's eye and the preacher drove the exile forth with his execrations, wild curses hissed from between their teeth.

But amongst them stood one in gaudy raiment, light and delicate in form, smiling with sweet condescension amid the shuddering of the listeners. He bore his lithe figure with a frivolous grace and ever simpered as if he had no soul to be touched. And suddenly behind crept a dark-robed squalid form breathless like a hunted wolf, his wrists bound with cords. His face was ploughed by age and despair, his eyes were full of the hungry appealing look of long-unspoken suffering, his mouth was austere with the pain of self-repression. He saw the willowy grace of the smiling youth and over his furrowed face shot a gleam as of a long past memory of happiness, only to vanish and leave the mouth more hard and the eyes more wolvish than ever. Some magnetic sense of the wild gaze fixed on him made

the gay young head turn and see the looks mad as in a death-wrestle and the famished eyes of age passionately pleading with their world of sorrow behind them. The beautiful young eyes shook off the strong hunger of the glances untouched beneath the armour of soullessness and frivolity, and the head of the squalid fugitive sank upon his breast; and the youth passed with a light springy gait out of the doorway. Moved with resistless pity I approached and cut the cords of the captive.

And when the aged figure stood erect, it was one I long had seen in dreams by day and visions by night, the theme of painter and poet ; still the austere visage with the shadow upon it, still the hungry, woe-reflecting pools of darkness beneath the cliff of brow, calm with the gleam of death in them, still the long past of agony furrowed deep in the lines of the face. But there was no madness of hate balefully gleaming in the looks ; only the unfathomable light of a poet's thought, like the midnight holding ranks of tearful stars within it. And he bade me for my charity to follow him. Out into the night overwept by infinite worlds ; out by the tortuous streets that nursed gloom almost palpable ; out from the eastern gate. Round us the darkness deepened and I seemed to have entered a valley clad with forest trees that swept away from my eyes even the feeble glimmer of the starlight. Denser still the darkness grew, as I heard before me strange ghostly whisperings answered in whispers by my guide. We were passing downwards step by step and a dread cavernous light seemied to flush up at intervals from the deep below and showed me a filmy figure made as of moonlight pacing before me. And with the light rose faint wailings as of innumerable winter-winds presaging storm and ruin. Swifter grew our passage downwards, more appalling the lightning-gleams, more definite the sea of dolorous cries. Through circles of horror and agony we hurried, scarce conscious in our fear of the steps we made. Like leaves blown helplessly before a hurricane, we shivered as we flew from sphere to sphere of lamentation and torture. I closed my eyes to shut out the ghastly sights ; but through our eyelids pierced the flashes of the agonising light and through the portals of our ears the whole loathsome world of pain pressed in upon our souls and seared

them. More appalling grew the shrieks and groans that rent the air, making even our unsharing existence bitter. The weight upon the heart sickened it as we seemed to reach the bottom of the gulf profound.

But gradually the wailing died away ; the flashing ceased ; and our eyes peered through the gloom to see the land of mystery we had entered. Scarce could we catch the form of anything, so unsubstantial was the whole vast region. Shadows flitted round us, shedding an atmosphere of awe. But never had I felt such sinking of the heart, such wild dismay as when I caught the mist of scarce-heard sighing that rose to our senses. The loud groans and shrieks and lamentations we had heard before expressed not one tithe of the agony of this. It was as if the myriads that had lived on earth were crushing down the fountain of woe within their broken hearts and their suppressed sobs gathered into

“one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land where no man comes  
Or hath come since the making of the world”.

Never a groan or keen cry rose above the limitless sea of pain. So surpassing was the agony, so exquisite its pangs that common human utterance was reliefless and vain. It was an agony beyond wailing or tears. Oh the weight of it ! Who could measure its torture ? Surely no frame of mortal mould could outlast a moment of it. And yet the long ages had come and gone and were to come and go, every instant of them as a thousand years.

I marvelled what the woe could be that made the whole air so tremulous with suppression of suffering and existence one agonising throb. Struck by a sudden gesture of agitation in my guide I raised my eyes to his face. His spirit was deeply moved by some sight his gaze gloated on. I followed its direction and there the youthful figure we had left on earth stood transfixed in mute agony, the face all livid with fear, the form turned to stone by some near torture. He gazed into the air in a trance of torment. And as I looked I saw the double of my guide again in sordid garments and with the old look of infinite hate upon the face clutching him by the throat and rearing a dagger as if to slay him. I waited ; but the blow never came ; the

dagger did not fall. The youth turned and fled ; and then I saw it was but his own shadow that threatened him ; vain and unsubstantial as the air was his terror. Yet ever and anon as the dim light changed, he stood and stared into vacancy, his shadow again assuming in the dimness of his memory and imagination the form of his own treachery and seeming to seek revenge.

But soon he fled into the gloom beyond the reach of sight, to nurse his everlasting agony. And now my eyes had strengthened in the darkness, the flitting shadows took substance and I knew them from the pages of the past. There were all the false friends that had betrayed the love reposed in them, cowering before the scourge of the never-dying look of wrong. There were all the men who had sold their country to its foes, holding up imploring hands against the torrents of human blood that fell upon them. There was Simon suffering for ever the anguish he assumed in order to deceive. Every pharisaic rebel that had outwitted his master, every smooth-tongued flatterer that had cajoled his fellows, every heartless seducer that had led innocence astray, fled affrighted by his own shadow that took for ever and for ever the awful shape of his victim seeking vengeance. Oh the horror on the face of Judas as he shrank away from the kiss of his crucified master ! What would he not give to hang upon the same cross and have the nails through his feet and hands and the sword thrust into his side only to escape from this haunting agony ! Oh the sweetness of death now ! If only it would come and lay the finger of oblivion on his throbbing life. But for ever and for ever moved the phantom-Christ before him with the threatening kiss that seemed to drain his heart's blood. And at last within a statued colonnade I saw eight stern-visaged men holding their daggers forth to strike a filmy figure that stood beside a throne ; but their weapons ever seemed to miss their aim and to strike deep into their own bodies ; for it was their own shadows they struck at. Noble though the expression that the face of one of them bore, it was all lined and furrowed with intensest agony ; never more in all the infinity to come was he to rest without this grievous self-infliction of dagger-wounds, without this still more awful thrusting at his friend that was but the shadow of his thoughts.

So dread was the spectacle of his woe that we turned and fled up the dolorous steps of hell. But one devilish form with treacherous sword had crept towards us cowering in fear before a dark yet manly face that ever more approached as if to slay him. And after us up the grim corridor he seemed to rush chased by this shadow of his own deceit. And as the cries and passionate wailings grew first louder and louder and then faded into the downward distance with the flashings too, I seemed to have lost my way and to be issuing by a different exit into the world above. No gloomy valley met my eyes ; but a flashing summer isle set in the silver sea, its fruited trees and emerald hills lapped in tropic sunlight. I looked for my guide of the austere and suffering face and for the treacherous shade that had cowered and fled after me. But in their place there stood above me a sad-eyed yet sunny-visaged sage bearing a mystic wand ; and centuries of wise, sweet thought seemed to shine through his eyes ; and at his feet there lay prostrate kissing them the shade now grown all brutal, the beastlike traits of his soul appearing in his face and limbs ; treachery lurked in every line of his nature. He sought protection with the wise bearer of the wand from the haunting spirits of the air that had chased him out of hell and made the smiling earth a horror to his life. That such a gross and loathsome being should have followed me through the circles of torture into the paradise of this noble sage grieved me to the heart and I turned to tell my story as excuse. But he had fled and I woke to find it but a reverie.





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